

## **Final document**

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## **Acronyms**

AA Second Vatican Council, Decr. *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (November 18, 1965)

AG Second Vatican Council, Decr. *Ad gentes* (7 December 1965)

CCEO *Codex canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium* (October 18, 1990)

CD Second Vatican Council, Decr. *Christus Dominus* (October 28, 1965)

CIC *Codex iuris canonici* (25 January 1983)

CTI International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church* (2 March 2018)

CV Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter. *Caritas in Veritate* (June 29, 2009)

DD Francesco, Lett. Ap. *Wish you wish* (June 29, 2022)

DN Francesco, Lett. Enc. *Dilexit nos* (October 24, 2024)

DTC XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, *Working Document for the Continental Stage* (27 October 2022)

DV Second Vatican Council, Const. Dogm. *Dei Verbum* (November 18, 1965)

EG Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013)

FT Francesco, Lett. Enc. *Fratelli tutti* (3 October 2020)

GS Second Vatican Council, Const. Past. *Gaudium et Spes* (December 7, 1965)

LG Second Vatican Council, Const. Dogm. *Lumen Gentium* (November 21, 1964)

LS Francis, Encyclical Letter. *Laudato si'* (24 May 2015)

MC St. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis cultus* (February 2, 1974)

NMI St. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte* (January 6, 2001)

PE Francesco, Cost. Ap. *Praedicate Evangelium* (19 March 2022)

SC Second Vatican Council, Const. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (December 4, 1963)

SRS St. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter. *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (30 December 1987)

UR Second Vatican Council, Decr. *Unitatis Redintegratio* (November 21, 1964)

UUS St. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter. *Ut unum sint* (25 May 1995)

## Introduction

*Jesus came and stood in the middle and said to them, "Peace be with you!" With that, he showed them his hands and hip. And the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord (Jn 20:19-20).*

1. Every new step in the life of the Church is a return to the source, a renewed experience of the encounter with the Risen One that the disciples experienced in the Upper Room on Easter evening. Like them, we too, participating in this Synodal Assembly, have felt enveloped by His mercy and touched by His beauty. Living the conversation in the Spirit, listening to one another, we have perceived His presence in our midst: the presence of the One who, by giving the Holy Spirit, continues to awaken in His People a unity that is the harmony of differences.

2. In contemplating the Risen One, we remember that "we were baptized into his death" (Rom 6:3). We saw the signs of His wounds, transfigured by a new life, but forever engraved in His humanity. These wounds continue to bleed in the bodies of so many brothers and sisters, also because of our faults. Our gaze on the Lord does not distance us from the dramas of history, but opens our eyes to recognize the suffering that surrounds us and penetrates us: the faces of children terrified by war, the tears of their mothers, the shattered dreams of so many young people, the refugees who face terrible journeys, the victims of climate change and social injustice. Their sufferings have resounded among us not only through the media, but also in the voices of many, personally involved with their families and their peoples in these tragic events. In the days when we have been gathered in this House, many, too many wars have continued to cause death and destruction, the desire for revenge and the loss of consciences. We join Pope Francis' repeated appeals for peace, condemning the logic of violence, hatred, revenge and committing ourselves to promoting that of dialogue, brotherhood and reconciliation. Authentic and lasting peace is possible and together we can build it. "The joys and hopes, the sorrows and anxieties of the people of today, especially of the poor and of all those who suffer" (GS 1) were once again the joys and sorrows of all of us, Christ's disciples.

3. Since the Holy Father launched this Synod in 2021, we have embarked on a journey whose richness and fruitfulness we are increasingly discovering. We have listened, attentive to grasp in the many voices what "the Spirit says to the Churches" (Rev 2:7). The journey began with the extensive consultation of the People of God in our Dioceses and Eparchies. It continued with the national and continental stages, in the circularity of a dialogue constantly relaunched by the General Secretariat of the Synod through synthesis and working documents. The celebration of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in its two Sessions now allows us to hand over to the Holy Father and to all the Churches the witness of what we have experienced and the fruit of our discernment, for a renewed missionary zeal. The journey has been marked at every stage by the wisdom of the "sense of faith" of the People of God. Step by step, we understood that at the heart of the *Synod 2021-2024. For a synodal Church. Communion, participation, mission*: there is a call to joy and renewal of the Church in following the Lord, in the commitment to the service of her mission, in the search for ways to be faithful to her.

4. This call is based on the common identity of baptism, it is rooted in the diversity of contexts in which the Church is present and finds unity in the one Father, the one Lord and the one Spirit. It challenges all the baptized, without exception: "The whole People of God is the subject of the proclamation of the Gospel. In it, every baptized person is summoned to be the protagonist of the mission since we are all missionary disciples" (CTI, n. 53). The synodal journey thus directs us towards a full and visible unity of Christians, as the delegates of the other Christian traditions have testified with their presence. Unity ferments silently within the Holy Church of God: it is a prophecy of unity for the whole world.

5. The entire synodal journey, rooted in the Tradition of the Church, took place in the light of the conciliar magisterium. The Second Vatican Council was, in fact, like a seed sown in the field of the world and of the Church. The daily life of believers, the experience of the Churches in every people and culture, the many testimonies of holiness, the reflection of theologians have been the soil in which it has sprouted and grown. The Synod 2021-2024 continues to draw on the energy of that seed and develop its potential. The synodal journey is in fact putting into practice what the Council taught about the Church as the Mystery and People of God, called to holiness through a continuous conversion that comes from listening to the Gospel. In this sense it constitutes a true act of further reception of the Council, prolongs its inspiration and relaunches its prophetic power for today's world.

6. We do not hide the fact that we have experienced in ourselves fatigue, resistance to change and the temptation to let our ideas prevail over listening to the Word of God and the practice of discernment. And yet, the mercy of God, the most tender Father, allows us each time to purify hearts and to continue on the journey. We recognized this by beginning the Second Session with a Penitential Vigil, in which we asked forgiveness for our sins, feeling ashamed of them, and raised our intercession for the victims of the evils of the world. We have called our sins by name: against peace, against creation, indigenous peoples, migrants, minors, women, the poor, listening, communion. This made us understand that synodality requires repentance and conversion. In the celebration of the sacrament of God's mercy we have the experience of being unconditionally loved: the hardness of hearts is overcome and we open ourselves to communion. This is why we want to be a merciful Church, capable of sharing with everyone the forgiveness and reconciliation that come from God: pure grace of which we are not masters, but only witnesses.

7. We have already been able to see the first fruits of the synodal journey that began in 2021. The simplest, but most precious, ones ferment in the life of families, parishes, associations and movements, small Christian communities, schools and religious communities in which the practice of conversation in the Spirit, community discernment, sharing of vocational gifts and co-responsibility in the mission is growing. The meeting of parish priests for the Synod (Sacrofano [Rome], 28 April – 2 May 2024) made it possible to appreciate these rich experiences and to relaunch their journey. We are grateful and happy for the voice of so many communities and faithful who live the Church as a place of welcome, hope and joy.

8. The First Session of the Assembly bore other fruits. In the *Synthesis Report*, attention was drawn to some issues of great importance for the life of the Church, which the Holy Father, at the end of an international consultation, entrusted to Study Groups made up of Pastors and experts from all continents, called to work with a synodal method. The areas of the Church's life and mission that they have already begun to deepen are the following:

1. Some aspects of relations between the Eastern Catholic Churches and the Latin Church.

2. Listening to the cry of the poor.
3. The mission in the digital environment.
4. The revision of the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* in a missionary synodal perspective.
5. Some theological and canonical questions concerning specific ministerial forms.
6. The revision, in a synodal and missionary perspective, of the documents that govern relations between Bishops, Religious, Ecclesial Groups.
7. Some aspects of the figure and ministry of the Bishop (in particular: criteria for the selection of candidates for the episcopate, judicial function of the Bishop, nature and conduct of visits *ad limina Apostolorum*) in a synodal missionary perspective.
8. The role of the Pontifical Representatives in a missionary synodal perspective.
9. Theological criteria and synodal methodologies for a shared discernment of controversial doctrinal, pastoral and ethical issues.
10. The reception of the fruits of the ecumenical journey among the People of God.

In addition to these Groups, there is the Canonical Commission, activated in agreement with the Dicastery for Legislative Texts, at the service of the necessary innovations in ecclesiastical norms, and the discernment entrusted to the Symposium of the Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar on the pastoral accompaniment of persons in situations of polygamous marriage. The work of these Groups and Commissions has begun the implementation phase, has enriched the work of the Second Session, and will help the Holy Father in his pastoral and governance choices.

9. The synodal process does not end with the end of the current Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, but includes the implementation phase. As members of the Assembly, we feel it is our duty to engage in its animation as missionaries of synodality within the communities from which we come. We ask all the local Churches to continue their daily journey with a synodal methodology of consultation and discernment, identifying concrete ways and formation paths to achieve a tangible synodal conversion in the various ecclesial realities (parishes, institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life, aggregations of the faithful, dioceses, episcopal conferences, groupings of churches, etc.). An evaluation of the progress made in terms of synodality and the participation of all the baptized in the life of the Church should also be envisaged. We suggest that the Bishops' Conferences and Synods of the Churches *sui iuris* dedicate people and resources to accompany the path of growth as a synodal Church in mission and to maintain contact with the General Secretariat of the Synod (cf. EC 19 §§ 1 and 2). We ask it to continue to be vigilant about the synodal quality of the working method of the Study Groups.

10. Offered to the Holy Father and the Churches as a fruit of the XVI General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, this *Final Document* treasures all the steps taken so far. It brings together some important convergences that emerged in the First Session, the contributions from the Churches in the months between the First and Second Sessions, and what matured, especially thanks to conversation in the Spirit, during the Second Session.

11. The *Final Document* expresses the awareness that the call to mission is at the same time the call to conversion of each particular Church and of the whole Church, in the perspective indicated in the

Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (cf. n. 30). There are five parts of the text. The first, entitled *The Heart of Synodality*, outlines the theological and spiritual foundations that illuminate and nourish what comes next. It re-proposes the shared understanding of synodality that emerged in the First Session and develops its spiritual and prophetic perspectives. The conversion of the feelings, images and thoughts that inhabit our hearts proceeds together with the conversion of pastoral and missionary action. The second part, entitled *Together, on the boat*, is dedicated to the conversion of the relationships that build up the Christian community and shape the mission in the interweaving of vocations, charisms and ministries. The third, *"Cast the Net"*, identifies three practices that are intimately connected: ecclesial discernment, decision-making processes, a culture of transparency, accountability and evaluation. With regard to them too, we are asked to initiate paths of "missionary transformation", for which a renewal of the bodies of participation is urgently needed. The fourth part, under the title *An Abundant Catch*, outlines the way in which it is possible to cultivate in new forms the exchange of gifts and the interweaving of the bonds that unite us in the Church, at a time when the experience of being rooted in a place is profoundly changing. This is followed by a fifth part, *"I send you too"*, which allows us to look at the first step to be taken: to take care of the formation of all, in the People of God, in missionary synodality.

12. The development of the *Final Document* is guided by the Gospel accounts of the Resurrection. The race to the tomb at the dawn of Easter, the appearance of the Risen Lord in the Upper Room and on the shore of the lake inspired our discernment and nourished our dialogue. We invoked the paschal gift of the Holy Spirit, asking him to teach us what we must do and show us the path to follow all together. With this document, the Assembly recognizes and testifies that synodality, a constitutive dimension of the Church, is already part of the experience of many of our communities. At the same time, it suggests paths to follow, practices to implement, horizons to explore. The Holy Father, who has convoked the Church in Synod, will tell the Churches, entrusted to the pastoral care of the Bishops, how to continue our journey sustained by the hope that "does not disappoint" (Rom 5:5).

## **Part I – The Heart of Synodality**

Called by the Holy Spirit to conversion

*On the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb in the morning, when it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved (Jn 20:1-2).*

13. On Easter morning we find three disciples: Mary Magdalene, Simon Peter, the disciple whom Jesus loved. Each of them seeks the Lord in his or her own way; Everyone has their own role in the dawn of hope. Mary Magdalene is driven by a love that leads her first to the tomb. Warned by her, Peter and the Beloved Disciple go to the tomb; the Beloved Disciple runs with the strength of youth, seeks with the gaze of one who intuitively first, but knows how to give way to the one who, older, has received the task of guidance; Peter, weighed down by having denied the Lord, is awaited for the appointment with mercy of which he will be a minister in the Church. Mary remains in the garden, she hears herself called by name, she recognizes the Lord who sends her to announce His resurrection to the community of disciples. For this reason the Church recognizes her as the Apostle of the Apostles. Their dependence on each other embodies the heart of synodality.

14. The Church exists to bear witness to the world to the decisive event of history: the resurrection of Jesus. The Risen One brings peace to the world and gives us the gift of His Spirit. The living Christ is the source of true freedom, the foundation of hope that does not disappoint, the revelation of the true face of God and of man's ultimate destiny. The Gospels tell us that in order to enter into the Easter faith and become witnesses of it, it is necessary to recognize one's own inner emptiness, the darkness of fear, doubt, sin. But those who in the darkness have the courage to go out and search for them, actually discover that they are being sought, called by name, forgiven and sent together with their brothers and sisters.

### **The Church as the People of God, Sacrament of Unity**

15. From Baptism in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit flows the identity of the People of God. It is carried out as a call to holiness and a sending out on mission to invite all peoples to accept the gift of salvation (cf. Mt 28:18-19). It is therefore from Baptism, in which Christ clothes us with himself (cf. Gal 3:27) and makes us born again of the Spirit (cf. Jn 3:5-6) as children of God, that the missionary synodal Church is born. The whole of Christian life has its source and horizon in the mystery of the Trinity, which awakens in us the dynamism of faith, hope and charity.

16. "It pleased God to sanctify and save men and women not separately and without any connection between them, but to make them a People who would recognize him in truth and serve him in holiness" (LG 9). The People of God on their journey towards the Kingdom are continually nourished by the Eucharist, the source of communion and unity: "Because there is one bread, we are one body, though many, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor 10:17). The Church, nourished by the sacrament of the Body of the Lord, is constituted as His Body (cf. LG 7): "you are the Body of Christ, and each according to his own part, his members" (1 Cor 12:27). Enlivened by grace, she is the Temple of the Holy Spirit (cf. LG 4): it is he, in fact, who animates and builds it, making us all the living stones of a spiritual edifice (cf. 1 Pt 2:5; LG 6).

17. The synodal process has given us a "spiritual taste" (EG 268) to be the People of God, gathered from every tribe, language, people and nation, living in different contexts and cultures. It is never the simple sum of the baptized, but the communitarian and historical subject of synodality and mission, still pilgrim in time and already in communion with the Church in heaven. In the different contexts in which the individual Churches are rooted, the People of God proclaim and bear witness to the Good News of salvation; living in the world and for the world, he walks together with all the peoples of the earth, dialogues with their religions and their cultures, recognizing in them the seeds of the Word, advancing towards the Kingdom. Incorporated into this People by faith and Baptism, we are sustained and accompanied by the Virgin Mary, "a sign of sure hope and consolation" (LG 68), by the Apostles, by those who bore witness to their faith to the point of giving their lives, by the saints of every time and place.

18. In the holy People of God, which is the Church, the communion of the faithful (*communio Fidelium*) is at the same time the communion of the Churches (*communio Ecclesiarum*), which is manifested in the communion of Bishops (*communio Episcoporum*), by reason of the very ancient principle that "the Church is in the Bishop and the Bishop is in the Church" (St. Cyprian, *Epistle* 66, 8). At the service of this manifold communion the Lord placed the Apostle Peter (cf. Mt 16:18) and his successors. By virtue of the Petrine ministry, the Bishop of Rome is "the perpetual and visible source and foundation" (LG 23) of the Church's unity.

19. "In the heart of God there is a preferential place for the poor" (EG 197), the marginalized and the excluded, and therefore also in that of the Church. In them the Christian community encounters the face and flesh of Christ, who, though he was rich, became poor for our sake, so that we might become rich through his poverty (cf. 2 Cor 8:9). The preferential option for the poor is implicit in the Christological faith. The poor have a direct knowledge of the suffering Christ (cf. EG 198) which makes them heralds of a salvation received as a gift and witnesses of the joy of the Gospel. The Church is called to be poor with the poor, who are often the majority of the faithful, and to listen to them, learning together to recognize the charisms they receive from the Spirit, and to consider them as subjects of evangelization.

20. "Christ is the light of the Gentiles" (LG 1) and this light shines on the face of the Church, even though she is marked by the fragility of the human condition and the opacity of sin. She receives from Christ the gift and responsibility of being the effective leaven of the bonds, relationships and brotherhood of the human family (cf. AG 2-4), witnessing to the meaning and goal of his journey in the world (cf. GS 3 and 42). He assumes this responsibility today in a time dominated by the crisis of participation – that is, of feeling part of and actors in a common destiny – and by an individualistic conception of happiness and salvation. His vocation and his prophetic service (cf. LG 12) consist in witnessing to God's plan to unite all humanity to himself in freedom and communion. The Church, which is "the Kingdom of Christ already mysteriously present" (LG 3) and "is the seed and beginning of this Kingdom on earth" (LG 5), therefore walks together with all humanity, committing herself with all her strength to human dignity, the common good, justice and peace, and "yearns for the perfect Kingdom" (LG 5). when God will be "all in all" (1 Cor 15:28).

### **The sacramental roots of the People of God**

21. The synodal journey of the Church has led us to rediscover that the variety of vocations, charisms and ministries has a root: "we were all baptized into one body by the one Spirit" (1 Cor 12:13). Baptism is the foundation of Christian life because it introduces everyone to the greatest gift: to be children of God, that is, to share in Jesus' relationship to the Father in the Spirit. There is nothing higher than this dignity, equally given to every person, which makes us clothe ourselves in Christ and be grafted onto him like branches in the vine. In the name of "Christian" that we have the honor of carrying is contained the grace that is the basis of our life and that makes us walk together as brothers and sisters.

22. By virtue of Baptism, "the holy People of God also share in Christ's prophetic function, bearing living witness to him above all by a life of faith and charity" (LG 12). Thanks to the anointing of the Holy Spirit received in Baptism (cf. 1 Jn 2:20, 27), all believers possess an instinct for the truth of the Gospel, called *sensus fidei*. It consists in a certain connaturality with divine realities, based on the fact that in the Holy Spirit the baptized "are made partakers of the divine nature" (DV 2). From this participation derives the attitude of intuitively grasping what is in conformity with the truth of Revelation in the communion of the Church. For this reason, the Church is certain that the holy People of God cannot err in believing when the totality of the baptized expresses their universal consent in matters of faith and morals (cf. LG 12). The exercise of the *sensus fidei* is not to be confused with public opinion. It is always linked to the discernment of Pastors at the different levels of ecclesial life, as shown by the articulation of the phases of the synodal process. It aims to reach that consensus of the faithful (*consensus fidelium*) which constitutes "a sure criterion for determining whether a particular doctrine or a particular practice belongs to the apostolic faith" (International Theological Commission, *The Sensus Fidei in the Life of the Church*, 2014, n. 3).

23. Through Baptism all Christians participate in the *sensus fidei*. Therefore, in addition to being the principle of synodality, it is also the foundation of ecumenism. "The path of synodality, which the Catholic Church is traveling, is and must be ecumenical, just as the ecumenical path is synodal" (Pope Francis, *Address to His Holiness Mar Awa III*, 19 November 2022). Ecumenism is first and foremost a question of spiritual renewal. It requires processes of repentance and healing of the memory of past wounds, up to the courage of fraternal correction in a spirit of evangelical charity. The Assembly resounded with enlightening testimonies of Christians from different ecclesial traditions who share friendship, prayer, sharing of life and commitment to the service of the poor and the care of our common home. In many regions of the world there is above all the ecumenism of blood: Christians of different backgrounds who together give their lives for faith in Jesus Christ. The witness of their martyrdom is more eloquent than any word: unity comes from the Cross of the Lord.

24. It is not possible to fully understand Baptism except within Christian initiation, that is, the journey through which the Lord, through the ministry of the Church and the gift of the Spirit, introduces us to the paschal faith and inserts us into Trinitarian and ecclesial communion. This itinerary takes a significant variety of forms depending on the age in which it is undertaken, the different emphases proper to the Eastern and Western traditions, and the specificities of each local Church. Initiation brings one into contact with a great variety of vocations and ecclesial ministries. In them is expressed the merciful face of a Church that teaches her children to walk with them. He listens to them and, while answering their doubts and questions, he is enriched by the newness that each person carries within himself, with his or her history and culture. In the practice of this pastoral action, the Christian community experiences, often without being fully aware of it, the first form of synodality.

25. Within the itinerary of Christian Initiation, the sacrament of Confirmation enriches the lives of believers with a special outpouring of the Spirit with a view to witness. The Spirit with whom Jesus was filled (cf. Lk 4:1), who anointed him and sent him to proclaim the Gospel (cf. Lk 4:18) is the same Spirit that is poured out on believers as a seal of belonging to God and as an anointing that sanctifies. For this reason, Confirmation, which makes the grace of Pentecost present in the life of the baptized and of the community, is a gift of great value for renewing the miracle of a Church moved by the fire of mission, which has the courage to go out on the paths of the world and the ability to make herself understood by all peoples and all cultures. All believers are called to contribute to this impetus, accepting the charisms that the Spirit distributes abundantly to each one and committing themselves to putting them at the service of the Kingdom with humility and creative resourcefulness.

26. The celebration of the Eucharist, especially on Sundays, is the first and fundamental way in which the Holy People of God gather and meet. In the Eucharistic celebration "the unity of the Church is both signified and produced" (UR 2). In the "full, conscious and active participation" (SC 14) of all the faithful, in the presence of different ministries and in the presidency of the Bishop or Priest, the Christian community is made visible, in which a differentiated co-responsibility of all for the mission is realized. For this reason, the Church, the Body of Christ, learns from the Eucharist to articulate unity and plurality: the unity of the Church and the multiplicity of Eucharistic assemblies; unity of the sacramental mystery and variety of liturgical traditions; unity of celebration and diversity of vocations, charisms and ministries. Nothing more than the Eucharist shows that the harmony created by the Spirit is not uniformity and that every ecclesial gift is destined for common edification. Every celebration of the Eucharist is also an expression of the desire and appeal to the unity of all the baptized, which is not yet full and visible.

Where the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist is not possible, the community, while desiring it, gathers around the celebration of the Word, where Christ is nevertheless present.

27. There is a close link between *synaxis* and *synodos*, between the Eucharistic assembly and the synodal assembly. Although in different forms, in both the promise of Jesus to be present where two or three are gathered in his name is fulfilled (cf. Mt 18:20). Synodal assemblies are events that celebrate the union of Christ with His Church through the action of the Spirit. It is he who ensures the unity of the ecclesial Body of Christ in the Eucharistic assembly as well as in the synodal assembly. The liturgy is a listening to the Word of God and a response to his covenant initiative. The synodal assembly is also a listening to the same Word, which resounds as much in the signs of the times as in the hearts of the faithful, and a response of the assembly that discerns God's will in order to put it into practice. Deepening the link between liturgy and synodality will help all Christian communities, in the pluriformity of their cultures and traditions, to adopt celebratory styles that manifest the face of a synodal Church. To this end, we ask for the establishment of a specific Study Group, to which we will also entrust the reflection on how to make liturgical celebrations more expressive of synodality; he will also be able to deal with preaching within liturgical celebrations and the development of a catechesis on synodality in a mystical key.

### **Meaning and dimensions of synodality**

28. The terms "synodality" and "synodal" derive from the ancient and constant ecclesial practice of meeting in synod. In the traditions of the Churches of East and West, the word "synod" refers to institutions and events that over time have taken on different forms, involving a plurality of subjects. In their variety, all these forms are united by coming together to dialogue, discern and decide. Thanks to the experience of recent years, the meaning of these terms has been better understood and even more lived. They have increasingly been associated with the desire for a Church that is closer to people and more relational, which is God's home and family. In the course of the synodal process, a convergence has matured on the meaning of synodality that is the basis of this Document: synodality is the walking together of Christians with Christ and towards the Kingdom of God, in union with all humanity; oriented to mission, it involves meeting in assembly at the different levels of ecclesial life, mutual listening, dialogue, community discernment, the formation of consensus as an expression of the making present of Christ alive in the Spirit and the taking of a decision in a differentiated co-responsibility. In this line we understand better what it means that synodality is a constitutive dimension of the Church (cf. CTI, n. 1). In simple and concise terms, it can be said that synodality is a path of spiritual renewal and structural reform to make the Church more participatory and missionary, that is, to make her more capable of walking with every man and woman radiating the light of Christ.

29. In the Virgin Mary, Mother of Christ, of the Church and of humanity, we see the features of a synodal, missionary and merciful Church shining in full light. She is in fact the figure of the Church who listens, prays, meditates, dialogues, accompanies, discerns, decides and acts. From her we learn the art of listening, attention to God's will, obedience to His Word, the ability to grasp the needs of the poor, the courage to set out on a journey, love that helps, song of praise and exultation in the Spirit. For this reason, as Saint Paul VI said, "the Church's action in the world is like a prolongation of Mary's solicitude" (MC 28).

30. In more detail, synodality designates three distinct aspects of the life of the Church:

a) in the first place, it refers to the "particular style that characterizes the life and mission of the Church, expressing its nature as walking together and gathering in assembly of the People of God convoked by the Lord Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit to proclaim the Gospel. It must be expressed in the ordinary way of living and working of the Church. This *modus vivendi et operandi* is achieved through community listening to the Word and the celebration of the Eucharist, the fraternity of communion and the co-responsibility and participation of the whole People of God, at its various levels and in the distinction of the different ministries and roles, in its life and mission" (CTI, n. 70a);

b) in the second place, "synodality then designates, in a more specific and determined sense from the theological and canonical point of view, those *ecclesial structures and processes* in which the synodal nature of the Church is expressed at the institutional level, in an analogous way, on the various levels of its realization: local, regional, universal. These structures and processes are at the service of the authoritative discernment of the Church, called to identify the direction to follow in listening to the Holy Spirit" (CTI, n. 70b);

c) thirdly, synodality designates "the punctual occurrence of those *synodal events* in which the Church is convoked by the competent authority and according to specific procedures determined by ecclesiastical discipline, involving in different ways, at the local, regional and universal levels, the whole People of God under the presidency of the Bishops in collegial and hierarchical communion with the Bishop of Rome, for the discernment of his journey and of particular questions, and for the taking of decisions and guidelines in order to fulfill his evangelizing mission" (CTI, n. 70c).

31. In the context of the conciliar ecclesiology of the People of God, the concept of communion expresses the profound substance of the mystery and mission of the Church, which has its source and summit in the celebration of the Eucharist, that is, union with God the Trinity and the unity among human persons which is realized in Christ through the Holy Spirit. Against this background, synodality "indicates the specific way of living and working of the Church, the People of God, which manifests and concretely realizes its being communion in 'walking together', in gathering in assembly and in the active participation of all its members in its evangelizing mission" (CTI, n. 6).

32. Synodality is not an end in itself, but aims at the mission that Christ entrusted to the Church in the Spirit. Evangelizing is "the essential mission of the Church [...] it is the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her profound identity" (EN 14). By being close to all, without distinction of persons, by preaching and teaching, by baptizing, by celebrating the Eucharist and the sacrament of Reconciliation, all the local Churches and the whole Church respond concretely to the Lord's command to proclaim the Gospel to all nations (cf. Mt 28:19-20; Mk 16:15-16). By valuing all charisms and ministries, synodality enables the People of God to proclaim and bear witness to the Gospel to the women and men of every place and time, making itself a "visible sacrament" (LG 9) of the fraternity and unity in Christ willed by God. Synodality and mission are intimately linked: mission illuminates synodality and synodality impels mission.

33. The authority of Pastors "is a specific gift of the Spirit of Christ the Head for the building up of the whole Body" (CTI, n. 67). This gift is linked to the sacrament of Holy Orders which configures Christ as Head, Shepherd and Servant and places those who receive it at the service of the Holy People of God in order to safeguard the apostolicity of the proclamation and to promote ecclesial communion at all levels. Synodality offers "the most appropriate interpretative framework for understanding the hierarchical ministry itself" (Francis, *Address for the Commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the*

*Synod of Bishops*, 17 October 2015) and places in the right perspective the mandate that Christ entrusts, in the Holy Spirit, to Pastors. She therefore invites the whole Church, including those who exercise authority, to conversion and reform.

### **Unity as harmony**

34. "The human creature, insofar as he is spiritual in nature, is fulfilled in interpersonal relationships. The more authentically they live them, the more their personal identity also matures. It is not by isolating himself that man values himself, but by placing himself in relationship with others and with God. The importance of such relationships thus becomes fundamental" (CV 53). A synodal Church is characterized as a space in which relationships can flourish, thanks to the mutual love that constitutes the new commandment left by Jesus to his disciples (cf. Jn 13:34-35). Within increasingly individualistic cultures and societies, the Church, "a people gathered together in the unity of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (LG 4), can bear witness to the power of relationships founded in the Trinity. The differences in vocation, age, sex, profession, condition and social belonging, present in every Christian community, offer each one that encounter with otherness indispensable for personal maturation.

35. It is first of all within the family, which the Council might call the "domestic Church" (LG 11), that the richness of relationships between persons united in their diversity of character, age and role is experienced. For this reason, families represent a privileged place to learn and experience the essential practices of a synodal Church. Despite the fractures and sufferings that families experience, they remain places where we learn to exchange the gift of love, trust, forgiveness, reconciliation and understanding. It is in the family that we learn that we have the same dignity, that we are created for reciprocity, that we need to be listened to and that we are capable of listening, discerning and deciding together, of accepting and exercising authority animated by charity, of being co-responsible and of being accountable for our actions. "The family humanizes people through the relationship of 'we' and at the same time promotes the legitimate differences of each one" (Francis, *Address to the Participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences*, 29 April 2022).

36. The synodal process has shown that the Holy Spirit constantly awakens in the People of God a great variety of charisms and ministries. "In the building up of the Body of Christ, too, there is a variety of members and functions. There is one Spirit, who distributes his various gifts for the benefit and good of the Church, according to her richness and the needs of the ministries (cf. 1 Cor 12:11)" (LG 7). Likewise, the aspiration emerged to broaden the possibilities of participation and exercise of differentiated co-responsibility of all the baptized, men and women. In this regard, however, the sadness caused by the lack of participation of so many members of the People of God in this journey of ecclesial renewal and by a widespread effort to live fully a healthy relationship between men and women, between generations and between individuals and groups of different cultural identities and social conditions, especially the poor and the excluded, was expressed.

37. Furthermore, the synodal process has highlighted the spiritual patrimony of the local Churches, in which and from which the Catholic Church exists, and the need to articulate their experiences. By virtue of catholicity, "the individual parts offer their gifts to the others and to the whole Church, so that the whole and the individual parts may benefit from the mutual communication of all and from striving in unity towards fullness" (LG 13). The ministry of the Successor of Peter "guarantees legitimate diversity and at the same time ensures that the particular not only does not harm unity, but rather serves it" (*ibid.*; cf. AG 22).

38. The whole Church has always been a plurality of peoples and languages, of Churches with their particular rites, disciplines and theological and spiritual patrimony, of vocations, charisms and ministries at the service of the common good. The unity of this variety is brought about by Christ, the cornerstone, and the Spirit, the master of harmony. This unity in diversity is precisely designated by the catholicity of the Church. A sign of this is the plurality of Churches *sui iuris*, the richness of which the synodal process has highlighted. The Assembly asks that we continue along the path of encounter, mutual understanding and exchange of gifts that nourish the communion of a Church of Churches.

39. Synodal renewal fosters the appreciation of contexts as places where God's universal call to be part of his people, of that Kingdom of God which is "righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom 14:17) is made present and fulfilled. In this way, different cultures are able to grasp the unity that underlies their plurality and open them to the prospect of the exchange of gifts. "The unity of the Church is not uniformity, but the organic integration of legitimate diversities" (NMI 46). The variety of expressions of the salvific message avoids reducing it to a single understanding of the life of the Church and of the theological, liturgical, pastoral and disciplinary forms in which it is expressed.

40. Appreciation of contexts, cultures and diversities, and of the relationships between them, is a key to growing as a missionary synodal Church and to journey, at the instigation of the Holy Spirit, towards the visible unity of Christians. We reaffirm the Catholic Church's commitment to continue and intensify the ecumenical journey with other Christians, by virtue of our common Baptism and in response to the call to live together the communion and unity among the disciples for which Christ prays at the Last Supper (cf. Jn 17:20-26). The Assembly welcomes with joy and gratitude the progress in ecumenical relations over the past sixty years, the documents of dialogue and the declarations expressing the common faith. The participation of the Fraternal Delegates enriched the development of the Assembly and we look with hope to the next steps on the path towards full communion thanks to the reception of the fruits of the ecumenical journey in ecclesial practices.

41. In every place on earth, Christians live side by side with people who are not baptized and serve God by practicing a different religion. Let us pray solemnly for them in the liturgy of Good Friday, let us collaborate with them and fight to build a better world, and together with them let us implore the one God to free the world from the evils that afflict it. The dialogue, encounter and exchange of gifts typical of a synodal Church are called to open up to relations with other religious traditions, with the aim of "establishing friendship, peace, harmony and sharing moral and spiritual values and experiences in a spirit of truth and love" (Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, *Response of the Church in India to the present day challenges*, 9 March 2016, cited in FT 271). In some regions, Christians who engage in building fraternal relationships with people of other religions face persecution. The Assembly encourages them to persevere in their commitment with hope.

42. The plurality of religions and cultures, the diversity of spiritual and theological traditions, the variety of the gifts of the Spirit and of the tasks in the community, as well as the diversity of age, sex and social affiliation within the Church, are an invitation to each one to recognize and assume his or her own partiality, renouncing the pretense of being at the centre and opening himself to the acceptance of other perspectives. Each one is the bearer of a particular and indispensable contribution to completing the common work. The synodal Church can be described by resorting to the image of the orchestra: the variety of instruments is necessary to give life to the beauty and harmony of music, within which the voice of each one maintains its own distinctive features at the service of the common mission. Thus the

harmony that the Spirit works in the Church is manifested, he who is harmony in person (cf. St. Basil, *On Psalm 29:1; On the Holy Spirit* XVI, 38).

### **Synodal spirituality**

43. Synodality is first and foremost a spiritual disposition that permeates the daily life of the baptized and every aspect of the Church's mission. A synodal spirituality flows from the action of the Holy Spirit and requires listening to the Word of God, contemplation, silence and conversion of heart. As Pope Francis said in the opening address of this Second Session, "the Holy Spirit is a sure guide, and our first task is to learn to distinguish His voice, because He speaks in everyone and in all things". A synodal spirituality also requires asceticism, humility, patience and a willingness to forgive and be forgiven. He welcomes with gratitude and humility the variety of gifts and tasks distributed by the Holy Spirit for the service of the one Lord (cf. 1 Cor 12:4-5). He does so without ambition or envy, nor desire for domination or control, cultivating the same sentiments as Christ Jesus, who "emptied himself into the form of a servant" (Phil 2:7). We recognize its fruit when the daily life of the Church is marked by unity and harmony in pluriformity. No one can proceed alone on a path of authentic spirituality. We need accompaniment and support, including formation and spiritual direction, as individuals and as a community.

44. The renewal of the Christian community is possible only by recognizing the primacy of grace. If personal and community spiritual depth is lacking, synodality is reduced to an organizational expedient. We are called not only to translate the fruits of a personal spiritual experience into community processes, but more profoundly to experience how practicing the new commandment of mutual love is the place and form of encounter with God. In this sense, the synodal perspective, while drawing on the rich spiritual patrimony of Tradition, contributes to renewing its forms: a prayer open to participation, a discernment lived together, a missionary energy that is born of sharing and radiates as service.

45. Conversation in the Spirit is a fruitful instrument which, despite its limitations, is fruitful in enabling us to listen to and discern "what the Spirit is saying to the Churches" (Rev 2:7). His practice aroused joy, amazement and gratitude and was experienced as a path of renewal that transforms individuals, groups, the Church. The word "conversation" expresses something more than just dialogue: it harmoniously intertwines thought and feeling and generates a shared life world. For this reason, it can be said that conversion is at stake in conversation. This is an anthropological fact that is found in different peoples and cultures, united by the practice of gathering in solidarity to deal with and decide on vital issues for the community. Grace brings this human experience to completion: conversing "in the Spirit" means living the experience of sharing in the light of faith and in the search for God's will, in an evangelical atmosphere within which the Holy Spirit can make His unmistakable voice heard.

46. At every stage of the synodal process, the need for healing, reconciliation and rebuilding of trust within the Church has resounded, particularly following the too many scandals linked to the different types of abuse, and in society. The Church is called to put at the centre of her life and action the fact that in Christ, through Baptism, we are entrusted to one another. The recognition of this profound reality is transformed into a sacred duty that makes us able to recognize mistakes and rebuild trust. Walking this path is an act of justice and a missionary commitment of the People of God in our world and a gift that we must invoke from on high. The desire to continue walking on this path is the fruit of synodal renewal.

### **Synodality as a social prophecy**

47. Practiced with humility, the synodal style can make the Church a prophetic voice in today's world. "The synodal Church is like a standard raised among the nations (cf. Is 11:12)" (Francis, *Address for the Commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops*, 17 October 2015). We live in an era marked by ever-widening inequalities, growing disillusionment with traditional models of government, disenchantment with the functioning of democracy, growing autocratic and dictatorial tendencies, the predominance of the market model without regard for the vulnerability of people and creation, and the temptation to resolve conflicts by force rather than dialogue. Authentic practices of synodality allow Christians to develop a culture capable of critical prophecy with regard to the dominant thought and thus offer a special contribution to the search for answers to many of the challenges that contemporary societies have to face and to the construction of the common good.

48. The synodal way of living relationships is a social witness that responds to the human need to be welcomed and to feel recognized within a concrete community. It is a challenge to the growing isolation of people and to cultural individualism, which the Church has also often absorbed, and it calls us to mutual care, interdependence and co-responsibility for the common good. Likewise, it challenges an exaggerated social communitarianism that suffocates people and does not allow them to be subjects of their own development. The willingness to listen to everyone, especially the poor, stands in stark contrast to a world in which the concentration of power cuts off the poor, the marginalized, minorities and the land, our common home. Synodality and integral ecology both take the perspective of relationships and insist on the need to care for bonds: for this reason, they correspond and integrate each other in the way of living the Church's mission in the contemporary world.

## **Part II - On the boat, together**

The conversion of relationships

*Simon Peter, Thomas called Didymus, Nathaniel of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee and two other disciples were with them. Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We also come with you" (Jn 21:2-3).*

49. The Sea of Galilee is where it all began. Peter, Andrew, James, John had left the boat and the nets to go after Jesus. After Easter, we start again from that lake. In the night, a dialogue resounds on the shore: "I'm going fishing." "We'll come with you too." The synodal journey also began in this way: we heard the invitation of the Successor of Peter and we accepted it; We set out with him and behind him. Together we prayed, reflected, struggled and dialogued. But above all we have experienced that it is relationships that sustain the vitality of the Church, animating her structures. A synodal missionary Church needs to renew both.

## **New relationships**

50. Throughout the Synod and at all latitudes, there emerged a request for a Church more capable of nourishing relationships: with the Lord, between men and women, in families, in communities, between all Christians, between social groups, between religions, with creation. Many expressed their surprise at being asked and the joy of being able to make their voices heard in the community; There was also no shortage of those who shared the suffering of feeling excluded or judged also because of their marital situation, identity and sexuality. The desire for more authentic and meaningful relationships does not only express the aspiration to belong to a cohesive group, but corresponds to a profound awareness of

faith: the evangelical quality of community relationships is decisive for the witness that the People of God is called to give in history. "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:35). Relationships renewed by grace and the hospitality offered to the least according to Jesus' teaching are the most eloquent sign of the Holy Spirit's action in the community of disciples. To be a synodal Church, therefore, a true relational conversion is necessary. We must learn again from the Gospel that relationship nurturing is not a strategy or the tool for greater organizational effectiveness, but is the way God the Father revealed himself in Jesus and in the Spirit. When our relationships, even in their fragility, reveal the grace of Christ, the love of the Father, the communion of the Spirit, we confess with our lives our faith in God the Trinity.

51. It is to the Gospels that we must look in order to draw the map of the conversion that is required of us, learning to make Jesus' attitudes our own. The Gospels "present him to us constantly listening to the people who meet him along the roads of the Holy Land" (DTC 11). Whether it was men or women, Jews or pagans, doctors of the law or tax collectors, the righteous or sinners, beggars, the blind, lepers or the sick, Jesus did not send anyone away without stopping to listen and entering into dialogue. He revealed the face of the Father by coming to meet each one where his history and his freedom are found. From listening to the needs and faith of the people he met, words and gestures flowed that renewed their lives, opening the way to healed relationships. Jesus is the Messiah who "makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak" (Mk 7:37). He asks us his disciples to behave in the same way and gives us, with the grace of the Holy Spirit, the ability to do so, modeling our hearts on His: only "the heart makes any authentic bond possible, because a relationship that is not built with the heart is incapable of overcoming the fragmentation of individualism" (DN 17). When we listen to our brothers and sisters, we participate in the attitude with which God in Jesus Christ comes to meet each one.

52. The need for conversion in relationships unequivocally concerns those between men and women. Relational dynamism is inscribed in our condition as creatures. Sexual difference constitutes the basis of human relationality. "God created man in his own image; in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them" (Gen 1:27). In God's plan, this original difference does not entail inequality between man and woman. In the new creation, it is reread in the light of the dignity of Baptism: "Those who have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is no Jew or Greek; there is neither slave nor free; there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:27-28). As Christians we are called to welcome and respect, in the different ways and contexts in which it is expressed, this difference which is a gift of God and a source of life. We bear witness to the Gospel when we seek to live relationships that respect the equal dignity and reciprocity of men and women. The recurring expressions of pain and suffering by women from every region and continent, both lay and consecrated, during the synodal process, reveal how often we fail to do so.

### **In a plurality of contexts**

53. The call to renewal of relationships in the Lord Jesus resounds in the plurality of contexts in which his disciples live and carry out the Church's mission. Each of these contexts has particular riches that it is essential to take into account, linked to the pluralism of cultures. All of them, however, albeit in different ways, bear the signs of distorted relational logics that are sometimes opposed to those of the Gospel. Throughout history, relational closures have solidified into real structures of sin (cf. SRS 36), which influence the way people think and act. In particular, they generate blocks and fears, which we need to look in the face and go through in order to be able to set out on the path of relational conversion.

54. This dynamic has its roots in the evils that afflict our world, beginning with wars and armed conflicts, and with the illusion that a just peace can be achieved by force of arms. Equally lethal is the belief that all creation, even people, can be exploited at will for profit. The consequence of this is the many and diverse barriers that divide people, even in Christian communities, and limit the possibilities of some compared to those enjoyed by others: inequalities between men and women, racism, division into castes, discrimination against persons with disabilities, violation of the rights of minorities of all kinds, the unwillingness to welcome migrants. Even the relationship with the earth, our sister and mother (cf. LS 1), bears the signs of a fracture that endangers the lives of countless communities, particularly in the most impoverished regions, if not of entire peoples and perhaps of all humanity. The most radical and dramatic closure is that with regard to human life itself, which leads to the discarding of children, from the womb, and of the elderly.

55. Many evils that afflict our world are also manifested in the Church. The abuse crisis, in its various and tragic manifestations, has brought untold and often lasting suffering to victims and survivors, and to their communities. The Church must listen with particular attention and sensitivity to the voice of victims and survivors of sexual, spiritual, economic, institutional, power and conscience abuse by members of the clergy or persons in ecclesial office. Listening is a fundamental element of the journey to healing, repentance, justice and reconciliation. In an age that is experiencing a global crisis of trust and encourages people to live in distrust and suspicion, the Church must recognize her own shortcomings, humbly ask for forgiveness, care for victims, provide herself with tools of prevention, and strive to rebuild mutual trust in the Lord.

56. Listening to those who suffer exclusion and marginalization strengthens the Church's awareness that it is part of her mission to take on the burden of these wounded relationships so that the Lord, the Living One, may heal them. Only in this way can it be "like the sacrament, that is, a sign and instrument of intimate union with God and of the unity of the whole human race" (LG 1). At the same time, openness to the world makes it possible to discover that in every corner of the planet, in every culture and in every human group, the Spirit has sown the seeds of the Gospel. They bear fruit in the ability to live healthy relationships, to cultivate mutual trust and forgiveness, to overcome fear of the different and give life to welcoming communities, to promote an economy that is attentive to people and the planet, to be reconciled after a conflict. History gives us a legacy of conflicts motivated also in the name of religious affiliation, undermining the credibility of religions themselves. A source of suffering is the scandal of the division between Christian communions, the enmity between brothers and sisters who have received the same Baptism. The renewed experience of ecumenical impetus that accompanies the synodal journey, one of the signs of relational conversion, opens up to hope.

### **Charisms, vocations and ministries for the mission**

57. Christians, individually or in association, are called to make fruitful the gifts that the Spirit bestows in view of witnessing to and proclaiming the Gospel. "There are different charisms, but the Spirit is one; there are different ministries, but the Lord is one; there are different activities, but there is only one God, who works all things in everyone. To each one is given a special manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Cor 12:4-7). In the Christian community, all the baptized are enriched with gifts to be shared, each according to his or her own vocation and condition of life. The different ecclesial vocations are in fact multiple and articulated expressions of the one baptismal call to holiness and mission. The variety of charisms, which originates in the freedom of the Holy Spirit, is aimed at the unity of the

ecclesial Body of Christ (cf. LG 32) and to the mission in different places and cultures (cf. LG 12). These gifts are not the exclusive property of the recipient and exercise them, nor can they be a reason for vindication for himself or for a group. They are called to contribute both to the life of the Christian community, also with an adequate pastoral care of vocations, and to the development of society in its many dimensions.

58. Every baptized person responds to the demands of the mission in the contexts in which he lives and works on the basis of his or her own inclinations and abilities, thus manifesting the freedom of the Spirit in bestowing his or her gifts. It is thanks to this dynamism in the Spirit that the People of God, by listening to the reality in which they live, can discover new areas of commitment and new ways of fulfilling their mission. Christians who in various capacities – in the family and in other states of life, in the workplace and in the professions, in civic or political, social or ecological commitment, in the development of a culture inspired by the Gospel as well as in the evangelization of the culture of the digital environment – travel the paths of the world and in their living environments proclaim the Gospel, are sustained by the gifts of the Spirit.

59. They ask the Church not to be left alone, but to feel sent and supported. They ask to be nourished by the bread of the Word and the Eucharist, as well as by the fraternal bonds of the community. They ask that their commitment be recognized for what it is: Church action by virtue of the Gospel, not private option. Finally, they ask that the community accompany those who, by their witness, have been attracted by the Gospel. In a missionary synodal Church, under the guidance of their Pastors, communities will be able to send and support those they have sent. They will therefore be conceived primarily at the service of the mission that the faithful carry out within society, in family and work life, without concentrating exclusively on the activities that take place within them and on their organizational needs.

60. By virtue of Baptism, men and women enjoy equal dignity among the People of God. Yet, women continue to find obstacles in obtaining a fuller recognition of their charisms, their vocation and their place in the different areas of the Church's life, to the detriment of the service of the common mission. The Scriptures attest to the prominent role of many women in salvation history. A woman, Mary Magdalene, was entrusted with the first announcement of the Resurrection; on the day of Pentecost, Mary, the Mother of God, was present in the Upper Room, together with many other women who had followed the Lord. It is important that the relevant passages of Scripture find adequate space within the liturgical lectionaries. Some crucial turning points in the history of the Church confirm the essential contribution of women moved by the Spirit. Women make up the majority of those who attend churches and are often the first witnesses of the faith in families. They are active in the life of small Christian communities and in parishes; they manage schools, hospitals and reception centers; they are at the head of initiatives for reconciliation and the promotion of human dignity and social justice. Women contribute to theological research and are present in positions of responsibility in institutions linked to the Church, in the diocesan Curia and in the Roman Curia. There are women who play roles of authority or are heads of communities. This House calls for the full implementation of all the opportunities already provided for by current law regarding the role of women, particularly in places where they remain unimplemented. There are no reasons that prevent women from taking on leadership roles in the Church: it will not be possible to stop what comes from the Holy Spirit. The question of women's access to the diaconal ministry also remains open. Discernment in this regard must continue. The Assembly also calls for greater attention to be paid to the language and images used in preaching, teaching, catechesis and in

the drafting of official documents of the Church, giving greater space to the contribution of women saints, theologians and mystics.

61. Within the Christian community, special attention should be given to children: they not only need to be accompanied in the adventure of growing up, but they have much to give to the community of believers. When the apostles argue among themselves about who is the greatest, Jesus puts a child at the center, presenting him as a criterion for entering the Kingdom (cf. Mk 9:33-37). The Church cannot be synodal without the contribution of children, bearers of a missionary potential to be valued. Their voice is necessary for the community: we must listen to it and commit ourselves so that everyone in society listens to it, especially those who have political and educational responsibilities. A society that does not know how to welcome and care for children is a sick society; The suffering that many of them suffer from war, poverty and abandonment, abuse and trafficking is a scandal that requires the courage to denounce and the commitment of solidarity.

62. Young people also have a contribution to make to the synodal renewal of the Church. They are particularly sensitive to the values of fraternity and sharing, while rejecting paternalistic or authoritarian attitudes. Sometimes their attitude toward the Church comes across as criticism, but often it takes the positive form of a personal commitment to a welcoming community committed to fighting against social injustice and caring for our common home. The request to "walk together in daily life", made by young people in the Synod dedicated to them in 2018, corresponds exactly to the horizon of a synodal Church. For this reason, it is essential to ensure them caring and patient accompaniment; in particular, the proposal, which emerged thanks to their contribution, of "an experience of accompaniment in view of discernment", which includes fraternal life shared with adult educators, an apostolic commitment to be lived together in the service of the most needy, deserves to be taken up; an offer of spirituality rooted in prayer and sacramental life (cf. *Final Document of the XV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, "Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment"*, 161).

63. In promoting co-responsibility for the mission of all the baptized, we recognize the apostolic capacities of persons with disabilities who feel called and sent as active subjects of evangelization. We want to enhance the contribution that comes from the immense wealth of humanity they bring with them. We recognize their experiences of suffering, marginalization, discrimination, sometimes suffered even within the Christian community itself, due to paternalistic attitudes of commiseration. To encourage their participation in the life and mission of the Church, the creation of an Ecclesial Disability Observatory is proposed.

64. Among the vocations by which the Church is enriched, that of married couples stands out. The Second Vatican Council taught that "they possess in their state of life and in their order their own gift of grace in the midst of the People of God" (LG 11). The sacrament of marriage assigns a particular mission that concerns at the same time the life of the family, the building up of the Church and commitment in society. In particular, in recent years there has been a growing awareness that families are subjects and not only recipients of family ministry. For this reason, they need to meet and network, also thanks to the help of ecclesial institutions dedicated to the education of children and young people. Once again, the Assembly expresses closeness and support to those who live in a condition of solitude as a choice of fidelity to Tradition and to the Magisterium of the Church in matters of marriage and sexual ethics, in which they recognize a source of life.

65. In the course of the centuries, spiritual gifts have also given rise to various expressions of consecrated life. From the very beginning, the Church has recognized the action of the Spirit in the lives of those men and women who have chosen to follow Christ on the path of the evangelical counsels, consecrating themselves to the service of God both in contemplation and in many forms of service. The consecrated life is called to challenge the Church and society with its prophetic voice. In their centuries-old experience, religious families have developed experienced practices of synodal life and community discernment, learning to harmonize individual gifts and the common mission. Orders and Congregations, Societies of Apostolic Life, Secular Institutes, as well as Associations, Movements and New Communities have a special contribution to make to the growth of synodality in the Church. Today many communities of consecrated life are a laboratory of interculturality that constitutes a prophecy for the Church and for the world. At the same time, synodality invites – and sometimes challenges – the Pastors of the local Churches, as well as those responsible for consecrated life and ecclesial aggregations to strengthen relationships in order to give life to an exchange of gifts at the service of the common mission.

66. The mission involves all the baptized. The first task of lay men and women is to permeate and transform temporal realities with the spirit of the Gospel (cf. LG 31.33; AA 5-7). The synodal process, supported by a stimulus from Pope Francis (cf. Apostolic Letter in the form of Motu Proprio *Spiritus Domini*, 10 January 2021), urged the local Churches to respond with creativity and courage to the needs of the mission, discerning among the charisms some that should take a ministerial form, equipping themselves with adequate criteria, tools and procedures. Not all charisms need to be configured as ministries, nor do all the baptized have to be ministers, nor do all ministries have to be instituted. For a charism to be configured as a ministry, it is necessary for the community to identify a true pastoral need, accompanied by a discernment carried out by the Pastor together with the community on the opportunity to create a new ministry. As a result of this process, the competent authority takes the decision. In a missionary synodal Church, the promotion of more numerous forms of lay ministries is urged, that is, which do not require the sacrament of Holy Orders, not only in the liturgical sphere. They can be established or not established. A reflection must also be initiated on how to entrust lay ministries at a time when people move from one place to another with increasing ease, specifying the times and areas of their exercise.

67. Among the many ecclesial services, the Assembly recognized the contribution to the understanding of the faith and to the discernment offered by theology in the variety of its expressions. Theologians help the People of God to develop an understanding of reality enlightened by Revelation and to develop suitable responses and appropriate languages for mission. In the synodal and missionary Church, "the charism of theology is called to carry out a specific service [...]. Together with the experience of faith and the contemplation of the truth of the faithful people and with the preaching of the Pastors, it contributes to the ever deeper penetration of the Gospel. Moreover, 'as with any other Christian vocation, the ministry of the theologian, in addition to being personal, is also communitarian and collegial'" (CTI, n. 75), especially when it is carried out in the form of teaching entrusted with a canonical mission in ecclesiastical academic institutions. "Ecclesial synodality therefore commits theologians to doing theology in a synodal form, promoting among themselves the ability to listen, dialogue, discern and integrate the multiplicity and variety of requests and contributions" (*ibid.*). Along these lines, it is urgent to foster, through appropriate institutional forms, dialogue between Pastors and those engaged in

theological research. The Assembly invites theological institutions to continue their research aimed at clarifying and deepening the meaning of synodality and accompanying formation in the local Churches.

### **Ordained Ministry in the Service of Harmony**

68. Like all the ministries of the Church, the episcopate, the priesthood and the diaconate are at the service of the proclamation of the Gospel and the building up of the ecclesial community. The Second Vatican Council recalled that the ordained ministry of divine institution "is exercised in orders other than those who were called bishops, priests and deacons in ancient times" (LG 28). In this context, the Second Vatican Council affirmed the sacramentality of the episcopate (cf. LG 21), has recovered the communal reality of the priesthood (cf. LG 28) and has opened the way to the restoration of the permanent exercise of the diaconate in the Latin Church (cf. LG 29).

The ministry of the Bishop: composing the gifts of the Spirit in unity

69. The Bishop's task is to preside over a local Church, as a visible principle of unity within it and a bond of communion with all the Churches. The Council's affirmation that "by episcopal consecration the fullness of the sacrament of Holy Orders is conferred" (LG 21) makes it possible to understand the identity of the Bishop in the web of sacramental relations with Christ and with the "portion of the People of God" (CD 11) entrusted to him and which he is called to serve in the name of Christ the Good Shepherd. Those who are ordained bishops are not burdened with prerogatives and tasks that they must carry out alone. Rather, he receives the grace and the task of recognizing, discerning and composing in unity the gifts that the Spirit pours out on individuals and communities, working within the sacramental bond with priests and deacons, who are co-responsible with him for ministerial service in the local Church. In doing so, he realizes what is most proper and specific to his mission in the context of solicitude for the communion of the Churches.

70. That of the Bishop is a service in, with and for the community (cf. LG 20), carried out through the proclamation of the Word, the presiding over the Eucharistic celebration and the other sacraments. For this reason, the Synodal Assembly hopes that the People of God will have a greater voice in the choice of Bishops. It also recommends that the ordination of the bishop take place in the diocese to which he is destined as pastor and not in the diocese of origin, as is often the case, and that the principal consecrators be chosen from among the bishops of the ecclesiastical province, including, as far as possible, the metropolitan. It will thus appear better that the one who becomes a bishop contracts a bond with the Church to which he is destined, publicly assuming before her the commitments of his ministry. It is equally important that, especially during pastoral visits, he be able to spend time with the faithful in order to listen to them with a view to his discernment. This will help to experience the Church as the family of God. The constitutive relationship of the Bishop with the local Church does not appear today with sufficient clarity in the case of titular Bishops, for example the Papal Representatives and those who serve in the Roman Curia. It will be appropriate to continue to reflect on this issue.

71. Bishops also need to be accompanied and supported in their ministry. The Metropolitan can play a role in promoting fraternity among the Bishops of neighboring Dioceses. Along the synodal path, the need emerged to offer Bishops continuing education courses also in local contexts. Recalled was the need to specify the role of auxiliary Bishops and to expand the tasks that the Bishop can delegate. The experience of the Bishops Emeritus in their new way of being at the service of the People of God should also be valued. It is important to help the faithful not to cultivate excessive and unrealistic expectations

of the Bishop, remembering that he too is a fragile brother, exposed to temptation, in need of help like everyone else. An idealized vision of the Bishop does not facilitate his delicate ministry, which is instead supported by the participation of the whole People of God in the mission in a truly synodal Church.

With the Bishop: Priests and Deacons

72. In a synodal Church, priests are called to live their service in an attitude of closeness to people, of welcoming and listening to all, opening themselves to a synodal style. Priests "together with their Bishop constitute one presbyterate" (LG 28) and collaborate with him in discerning charisms and in accompanying and guiding the local Church, with particular attention to the service of unity. They are called to live priestly fraternity and to walk together in pastoral service. The presbyterate also includes priests who are members of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, who enrich it with the peculiarity of their charism. They, as well as priests who come from Eastern Churches *sui iuris*, celibate or married, *fidei donum* priests and those who come from other nations help the local clergy to open themselves to the horizons of the whole Church, while diocesan priests help other confreres to enter into the history of a concrete diocese, with its traditions and spiritual riches. In this way, even in the presbyterate, a true exchange of gifts takes place in view of the mission. Priests also need to be accompanied and supported, especially in the first stages of the ministry and in moments of weakness and fragility.

73. Servants of the mysteries of God and of the Church (cf. LG 41), deacons are ordained "not for the priesthood, but for the ministry" (LG 29). They exercise it in the service of charity, in proclamation and in the liturgy, showing in every social and ecclesial context in which they are present the relationship between the Gospel proclaimed and life lived in love, and promoting in the whole Church a conscience and a style of service to all, especially the poorest. The functions of deacons are many, as shown by Tradition, liturgical prayer and pastoral practice. They should be specified in response to the needs of each local Church, in particular to awaken and sustain the attention of all towards the poorest, within the framework of a missionary and merciful synodal Church. The diaconal ministry still remains unknown to many Christians, not least because, although it was restored by Vatican II in the Latin Church as a proper and permanent degree (cf. LG 29), has not yet been welcomed in all geographies. The teaching of the Council will need to be further deepened, also on the basis of an assessment of the many experiences in progress, but it already offers solid reasons to the local Churches not to delay in promoting the permanent diaconate in a more generous way, recognizing in this ministry a precious factor in the maturation of a Church that serves the following of the Lord Jesus who became the servant of all. This study will also help to better understand the meaning of the diaconal ordination of those who will become priests.

Collaboration among ordained Ministers within the Synodal Church

74. On several occasions during the Synodal process, gratitude was expressed to Bishops, Priests and Deacons for the joy, commitment and dedication with which they carry out their service. The difficulties that Pastors encounter in their ministry were also heard, linked above all to a sense of isolation, loneliness, as well as being overwhelmed by the requests to satisfy every need. The experience of the Synod can help Bishops, priests and deacons to rediscover co-responsibility in the exercise of the ministry, which also requires collaboration with the other members of the People of God. A more articulated distribution of tasks and responsibilities, a more courageous discernment of what belongs to the ordained ministry and of what can and must be delegated to others, will encourage its exercise in a

spiritually healthier and pastorally more dynamic way in each of its orders. This perspective will not fail to have an impact on decision-making processes characterized by a more clearly synodal style. It will also help to overcome clericalism understood as the use of power for one's own advantage and distortion of the authority of the Church which is service to the People of God. It is expressed above all in sexual, economic, conscientious and power abuses on the part of the Ministers of the Church. "Clericalism, fostered both by priests themselves and by the laity, generates a split in the ecclesial body that foments and helps to perpetuate many of the evils that we denounce today" (Francis, *Letter to the People of God*, 20 August 2018).

### **Together for the mission**

75. In response to the needs of the community and of the mission, throughout her history the Church has given life to certain ministries, distinct from those ordained. These ministries are the form that charisms take when they are publicly recognized by the community and by those who have the responsibility of guiding it and are placed in a stable way at the service of the mission. Some are more specifically aimed at the service of the Christian community. Of particular importance are the instituted ministries, which are conferred by the Bishop, once in a lifetime, with a specific rite, after appropriate discernment and adequate formation of the candidates. It is not a simple mandate or assignment of tasks; the conferral of the ministry is a sacramental that shapes the person and defines his or her way of participating in the life and mission of the Church. In the Latin Church it is a question of the ministry of lector and acolyte (cf. Apostolic Letter in the form of Motu Proprio *Spiritus Domini*, 10 January 2021), and that of the catechist (cf. Apostolic Letter in the form of Motu Proprio *Antiquum ministerium*, 10 May 2021). The terms and methods of their exercise must be defined by a mandate from the legitimate authority. It is the responsibility of the Episcopal Conferences to establish the personal conditions that candidates must meet and to draw up the formation programmes for access to these ministries.

76. These are flanked by ministries that are not instituted ritually, but exercised with stability by mandate from the competent authority, such as, for example, the ministry of coordinating a small ecclesial community, guiding the prayer of the community, organizing charitable actions, etc., which admit of a great variety according to the characteristics of the local community. An example of this are the catechists who in many regions of Africa have always been responsible for communities without priests. Even if there is no prescribed rite, it is advisable to make the custody public through a mandate before the community to facilitate its effective recognition. There are also extraordinary ministries, such as the extraordinary ministry of communion, the presiding over Sunday celebrations while awaiting a priest, the administration of some sacramentals or others. The Latin and Eastern canonical order already provides that, in some cases, the lay faithful, men or women, can also be extraordinary ministers of Baptism. In the Latin canonical system, the Bishop (with the authorization of the Holy See) can delegate the assistance of marriages to lay faithful, men or women. On the basis of the needs of local contexts, the possibility of expanding and stabilizing these opportunities for ministerial exercise by the lay faithful should be evaluated. Finally, there are spontaneous services, which do not need additional conditions or explicit recognition. They show that all the faithful, in various ways, participate in the mission through their gifts and charisms.

77. The lay faithful, men and women, need to be offered greater opportunities for participation, also exploring further forms of service and ministry in response to the pastoral needs of our time, in a spirit

of collaboration and differentiated co-responsibility. In particular, some concrete needs emerge from the synodal process to which an adequate response must be given in the different contexts:

- a) a wider participation of lay men and women in the processes of ecclesial discernment and in all phases of decision-making processes (elaboration and decision-making);
- b) wider access for lay men and women to positions of responsibility in dioceses and ecclesiastical institutions, including seminaries, institutes and theological faculties, in line with the provisions already in place;
- c) greater recognition and more decisive support for the life and charisms of consecrated men and women and their employment in positions of ecclesial responsibility;
- d) an increase in the number of qualified lay men and women who play the role of judge in canonical processes;
- e) an effective recognition of the dignity and respect for the rights of those who work as employees of the Church and its institutions.

78. The synodal process has renewed the awareness that listening is an essential component of every aspect of the Church's life: the administration of the sacraments, especially that of Reconciliation, catechesis, formation and pastoral accompaniment. In this context, the Assembly devoted attention to the proposal to establish a ministry of listening and accompaniment, showing a variety of orientations. Some expressed themselves favorably, because such a ministry would constitute a prophetic way of emphasizing the importance of listening and accompaniment in the community. Others said that listening and accompaniment are the task of all the baptized, without there being any need for a specific ministry. Still others highlight the need for a deepening, for example, of the relationship between this possible ministry and spiritual accompaniment, pastoral *counseling* and the celebration of the sacrament of Reconciliation. The proposal also emerged that the eventual ministry of listening and accompaniment should be destined in a particular way to welcome those who are on the margins of the ecclesial community, those who return after having distanced, those who are in search of the truth and want to be helped to encounter the Lord. The need therefore remains to continue discernment in this regard. Local contexts where this need is most felt will be able to promote experimentation and develop possible models on which to discern.

### **Part III – "Cast the Net"**

#### **Process conversion**

*Jesus said to them, "Little children, do you have nothing to eat?" They answered, "No." Then he said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find." They threw it and could no longer pull it up because of the large number of fish. (Jn 21:5-6)*

79. The fishing has not borne fruit and it is now time to return to shore. But an authoritative Voice resounds, inviting us to do something that the disciples would not have done on their own, pointing out a possibility that their eyes and minds could not perceive: "Cast the net on the right side of the boat and you will find". During the synodal process, we tried to listen to this Voice and to accept what it told us. In prayer and fraternal dialogue, we recognized that ecclesial discernment, care for decision-making

processes and the commitment to account for one's work and to evaluate the outcome of the decisions taken are practices with which we respond to the Word that shows us the paths of mission.

80. Those three practices are closely intertwined. Decision-making processes need ecclesial discernment, which requires listening in a climate of trust, which transparency and accountability support. Trust must be mutual: those who make decisions need to be able to trust and listen to the People of God, who in turn need to be able to trust those who exercise authority. This integral vision highlights that each of these practices depends on and sustains the others, in the service of the Church's ability to carry out her mission. Engaging in decision-making processes based on ecclesial discernment and assuming a culture of transparency, accountability and evaluation requires an adequate formation that is not only technical, but capable of exploring its theological, biblical and spiritual foundations. All the baptized need this formation in witness, mission, holiness and service, which emphasizes co-responsibility. It takes on particular forms for those who carry out positions of responsibility or at the service of ecclesial discernment.

### **Ecclesial discernment for the mission**

81. In order to foster relationships capable of sustaining and directing the Church's mission, it is a priority requirement to exercise the evangelical wisdom that enabled the apostolic community of Jerusalem to seal the outcome of the first synodal event with the words: "For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" (Acts 15:28). It is the discernment that, insofar as it is exercised by the People of God in view of the mission, we can qualify as "ecclesial". The Spirit whom the Father sent in the name of Jesus and who teaches all things (cf. Jn 14:26), guides believers in every age "into all truth" (Jn 16:13). By her presence and her continuous action, "Tradition, which comes from the Apostles, advances in the Church" (DV 8). Invoking his light, the People of God, sharing in Christ's prophetic function (cf. LG 12), "seeks to discern in the events, requests and aspirations in which he participates together with the other people of our time, what are the true signs of God's presence or plan" (GS 11). This discernment makes use of all the gifts of wisdom that the Lord distributes in the Church and is rooted in the *sensus fidei* communicated by the Spirit to all the baptized. In this spirit, the life of the missionary synodal Church must be reunderstood and reoriented.

82. Ecclesial discernment is not an organizational technique, but a spiritual practice to be lived in faith. It requires interior freedom, humility, prayer, mutual trust, openness to newness and abandonment to God's will. It is never the affirmation of a personal or group point of view, nor is it resolved in the simple sum of individual opinions; each one, speaking according to conscience, opens himself to listening to what others in conscience share, so as to seek together to recognize "what the Spirit says to the Churches" (Rev 2:7). By providing for the contribution of all the people involved, ecclesial discernment is at the same time a condition and a privileged expression of synodality, in which communion, mission and participation are lived together. Discernment is all the richer the more everyone is listened to. For this reason, it is essential to promote broad participation in the processes of discernment, with particular attention to the involvement of those who find themselves on the margins of the Christian community and society.

83. Listening to the Word of God is the starting point and criterion for all ecclesial discernment. The Sacred Scriptures, in fact, testify that God spoke to his people, to the point of giving us in Jesus the fullness of all Revelation (cf. DV 2), and indicate the places where we can hear his voice. God communicates with us first of all in the liturgy, because it is Christ himself who speaks "when Sacred

Scripture is read in the Church" (SC 7). God speaks through the living Tradition of the Church, her magisterium, personal and communal meditation on the Scriptures and the practices of popular piety. God continues to manifest himself through the cry of the poor and the events of human history. Again, God communicates with His People through the elements of creation, whose very existence refers to the action of the Creator and which is filled with the presence of the Spirit who gives life. Finally, God also speaks in the personal conscience of each person, which is "man's most secret nucleus and sanctuary, where he is alone with God, whose voice resounds in his own intimacy" (GS 16). Ecclesial discernment requires the continual care and formation of consciences and the maturation of the *sensus fidei*, so as not to neglect any of the places where God speaks and comes to meet his people.

84. The steps of ecclesial discernment can be articulated in different ways, according to places and traditions. Also on the basis of the synodal experience, it is possible to identify some key elements that should not be missing:

- a) the clear presentation of the object of discernment and the provision of adequate information and tools for its understanding;
- b) a suitable time to prepare with prayer, listening to the Word of God and reflection on the theme;
- c) an interior disposition of freedom with respect to one's own interests, personal and of groups, and a commitment to the search for the common good;
- d) attentive and respectful listening to the word of each one;
- e) the search for the broadest possible consensus, which will emerge through what most "makes hearts burn" (cf. Lk 24:32), without hiding conflicts and without seeking compromises on the cheap;
- f) the formulation by those who lead the process of the consensus reached and its presentation to all participants, so that they can show whether they recognize themselves in it or not.

On the basis of discernment, the appropriate decision will mature that commits the adherence of all, even when one's own opinion has not been accepted, and a time of reception in the community, which can lead to subsequent verifications and evaluations.

85. Discernment always takes place within a concrete context, the complexities and peculiarities of which must be known as best as possible. For discernment to be effectively "ecclesial", it is necessary to make use of the necessary means, including an adequate exegesis of the biblical texts, such as to help interpret and understand them while avoiding partial or fundamentalist approaches; a knowledge of the Fathers of the Church, of Tradition and of magisterial teachings, according to their different degrees of authority; the contributions of the different theological disciplines; the contributions of the human, historical, social and administrative sciences, without which it is not possible to know seriously the context in which and in view of which discernment takes place.

86. In the Church there is a great variety of approaches to discernment and established methodologies. This variety is a richness: with the appropriate adaptations to different contexts, the plurality of approaches can prove fruitful. In view of their common mission, it is important that they enter into a cordial dialogue, without dispersing the specificities of each one and without entrenching identities. In the local Churches, starting with small ecclesial communities and parishes, it is essential to offer opportunities for formation that spread and nourish a culture of ecclesial discernment for the mission,

especially among those who hold positions of responsibility. It is equally important to take care of the formation of accompanying figures or facilitators, whose contribution is very often crucial in carrying out the processes of discernment.

### **The articulation of decision-making processes**

87. In the synodal Church, "the whole community, in the free and rich diversity of its members, is summoned to pray, listen, analyze, dialogue, discern and advise in making decisions" (CTI, n. 68) for the mission. Encouraging the widest possible participation of the whole People of God in decision-making processes is the most effective way to promote a synodal Church. If it is true, in fact, that synodality defines the *modus vivendi et operandi* that qualifies the Church, it also indicates an essential practice in the fulfillment of her mission: discerning, reaching consensus, deciding through the exercise of the different structures and institutions of synodality.

88. The community of disciples summoned and sent by the Lord is not a uniform and amorphous subject. It is his Body of many and diverse members, a historical community subject in which the Kingdom of God takes place as the "seed and beginning" at the service of its advent in the whole human family (cf. LG 5). The Fathers of the Church already reflect on the communal nature of the mission of the People of God through a threefold *nihil sine*: "nothing without the Bishop" (St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Trallese*, 2.2), "nothing without the counsel of priests, nothing without the consent of the people" (St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Letter* 14.4). Where this logic of *nihil sine* is broken, the identity of the Church is obscured and her mission is inhibited.

89. The commitment to promote participation on the basis of differentiated co-responsibility is part of this ecclesiological reference framework. Each member of the community must be respected, valuing his or her abilities and gifts in view of the shared decision. Forms of institutional mediation are necessary that are more or less articulated in relation to the size of the community. The current law already provides for participatory bodies at different levels, which will be dealt with in the document later.

90. In order to facilitate its functioning, it seems appropriate to reflect on the articulation of decision-making processes. The latter usually provides for a phase of elaboration or instruction "through a common work of discernment, consultation and cooperation" (CTI, no. 69), which informs and supports the subsequent decision-making, which is the responsibility of the competent authority. There is no competition or contrast between the two phases, but with their articulation they contribute to the fact that the decisions taken are the result of obedience on the part of all to what God wants for His Church. For this reason, it is necessary to promote procedures that make reciprocity effective between the assembly and those who preside over it, in an atmosphere of openness to the Spirit and mutual trust, in search of a consensus that is as unanimous as possible. The process must also include the phase of implementation of the decision and that of its evaluation, in which the functions of the subjects involved are once again articulated in new ways.

91. There are cases in which the law in force already requires the authority to carry out a consultation before taking a decision. The pastoral authority has the duty to listen to those who participate in the consultation and, consequently, can no longer act as if it had not listened to them. Therefore, it will not depart from the fruit of the consultation, when it is in agreement, without a reason that is prevalent and that must be duly expressed (cf. CIC, can. 127, § 2, 2°; CCEO can. 934, § 2, 3°). As in any community that lives according to justice, in the Church the exercise of authority does not consist in the imposition of an

arbitrary will. In the various ways in which it is exercised, it is always at the service of communion and acceptance of the truth of Christ, in which and towards which the Holy Spirit guides us in different times and contexts (cf. Jn 14:16).

92. In a synodal Church, the decision-making competence of the Bishop, the College of Bishops and the Bishop of Rome is inalienable, since it is rooted in the hierarchical structure of the Church established by Christ at the service of unity and respect for legitimate diversity (cf. LG 13). However, it is not unconditional: an orientation that emerges in the consultative process as the result of a correct discernment, especially if carried out by the participatory bodies, cannot be ignored. A contrast between consultation and deliberation is therefore inadequate: in the Church, deliberation takes place with the help of all, never without the pastoral authority that decides by virtue of its office. For this reason, the recurring formula in the Code of Canon Law, which speaks of a "merely advisory" vote (*tantum consultivum*), must be re-examined to eliminate possible ambiguities. It therefore seems opportune to revise canonical norms in a synodal key, which clarifies both the distinction and the articulation between consultative and deliberative and sheds light on the responsibilities of those who take part in decision-making processes in the various functions.

93. Care for the orderly conduct and clear assumption of responsibility by the participants are crucial factors for the fruitfulness of decision-making processes in the ways envisaged here:

a) it is in particular the responsibility of the authority: to clearly define the subject matter of the consultation and deliberation, as well as the person responsible for taking the decision; identify those who need to be consulted, including on the basis of specific expertise or involvement in the matter; ensure that all participants have effective access to relevant information so that they can formulate their views on an informed basis;

b) those who express their opinion in a consultation, individually or as members of a collegial body, assume the responsibility of: offering a sincere and honest opinion, to the best of their knowledge and conscience; respect the confidentiality of the information received; offer a clear formulation of its opinion, identifying the main points, so that the authority, if it decides differently from the opinion received, can explain how it has taken it into account in its deliberation;

c) once the competent authority has formulated the decision, having respected the consultation process and clearly expressed the reasons for it, everyone, by reason of the bond of communion that unites the baptized, is obliged to respect it and put it into practice, even when it does not correspond to their own point of view, without prejudice to the duty to participate honestly in the evaluation phase as well. It is always possible to appeal to the higher authority, in the ways established by law.

94. A correct and resolute synodal implementation of decision-making processes will contribute to the progress of the People of God in a participatory perspective, in particular through the institutional mediations provided for by canon law, in particular participatory bodies. Without concrete changes in the short term, the vision of a synodal Church will not be credible and this will alienate those members of the People of God who have drawn strength and hope from the synodal journey. It is up to the local Churches to find appropriate ways to implement these changes.

**Transparency, accountability, evaluation**

95. Decision-making does not conclude the decision-making process. It must be accompanied and followed by accounting and evaluation practices, in a spirit of transparency inspired by evangelical criteria. Giving an account of one's ministry to the community belongs to the oldest tradition, dating back to the apostolic Church. Chapter 11 of the *Acts of the Apostles* offers us an example of this: when Peter returns to Jerusalem after baptizing Cornelius, a pagan, "the circumcised faithful rebuked him, saying, 'You entered the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them!'" (Acts 11:2-3). Pietro responds with a story that gives an account of the reasons for his actions.

96. In particular, with regard to transparency, the need has emerged to illuminate its meaning by linking it to a series of terms such as truth, loyalty, clarity, honesty, integrity, consistency, rejection of opacity, hypocrisy and ambiguity, absence of ulterior motives. The Gospel beatitude of the pure of heart was recalled (cf. Mt 5:8), the command to be "simple as doves" (Mt 10:16), and the words of the Apostle Paul: "We have rejected shameful dissimulations, not being cunning or falsifying the word of God, but openly proclaiming the truth and presenting ourselves before every human conscience before God" (2 Cor 4:2). It therefore refers to an underlying attitude, rooted in Scripture, rather than to a series of administrative or managerial procedures or requirements. Transparency, in its correct evangelical sense, does not compromise respect for confidentiality and confidentiality, the protection of persons, their dignity and their rights, even in the face of undue claims by civil authorities. All this, however, can never justify practices contrary to the Gospel or become a pretext to circumvent or cover up actions to combat evil. In any case, with regard to the confessional secrecy, "the sacramental seal is indispensable and no human power has jurisdiction, nor can it claim jurisdiction over it" (Francis, *Address to the Participants in the XXX Course on the Internal Forum organized by the Apostolic Penitentiary*, 29 March 2019).

97. The attitude of transparency, in the sense just indicated, is a safeguard of that trust and credibility which a synodal Church, attentive to relationships, cannot do without. When trust is violated, the weakest and most vulnerable people suffer the consequences. Where the Church enjoys trust, practices of transparency, accountability, and evaluation help to consolidate it, and are an even more critical element where the Church's credibility must be rebuilt. This is particularly important in the protection of minors and vulnerable people (*safeguarding*).

98. In any case, these practices contribute to ensuring the Church's fidelity to her mission. The lack of them is one of the consequences of clericalism and at the same time feeds it. It is based on the implicit assumption that those who have authority in the Church do not have to account for their actions and decisions, as if they were isolated or above the rest of the People of God. Transparency and accountability should not be invoked only when it comes to sexual, financial and other abuse. It also concerns the lifestyle of Pastors, pastoral plans, methods of evangelization and the ways in which the Church respects the dignity of the human person, for example with regard to working conditions within her institutions.

99. If the synodal Church wants to be welcoming, accountability must become customary practice at all levels. However, those in positions of authority have a greater responsibility in this regard and are called to account to God and His People. If over the centuries the practice of giving an account to superiors has been preserved, the dimension of the account that authority is called to give to the community must be recovered. Institutions and procedures consolidated in the experience of consecrated life (such as chapters, canonical visitations, etc.) can be a source of inspiration in this regard.

100. Equally necessary are structures and forms of regular evaluation of the way in which ministerial responsibilities of all kinds are exercised. Evaluation does not constitute a judgment on people: rather, it allows us to highlight the positive aspects and areas for possible improvement in the actions of those who have ministerial responsibilities and helps the Church to learn from experience, to recalibrate plans of action and to remain attentive to the voice of the Holy Spirit, focusing attention on the results of decisions in relation to the mission.

101. In addition to observing what is already provided for by the canonical norms on criteria and mechanisms of control, it is the responsibility of the local Churches, and especially of their groups, to construct in a synodal way effective forms and procedures of accountability and evaluation, appropriate to the variety of contexts, starting from the civil normative framework, the legitimate expectations of society and the effective availability of competence in the matter. In this work it is necessary to privilege participatory evaluation methodologies, to enhance the skills of those, especially lay people, who are more familiar with the processes of reporting and evaluation and to discern the good practices already present in local civil society, adapting them to ecclesial contexts. The way in which reporting and evaluation processes are implemented at local level is part of the report presented at the *ad limina visits*.

102. In particular, in forms appropriate to the different contexts, it seems necessary to ensure at least:

(a) effective functioning of the Councils for Economic Affairs;

b) the effective involvement of the People of God, in particular the most competent members, in pastoral and economic planning;

c) the preparation and publication (appropriate to the local context and with effective accessibility) of an annual financial statement, certified as far as possible by external auditors, which makes transparent the management of the assets and financial resources of the Church and its institutions;

d) the preparation and publication of an annual report on the performance of the mission, which also includes an illustration of the initiatives undertaken in the field of *safeguarding* (protection of minors and vulnerable persons) and the promotion of the access of lay persons to positions of authority and their participation in decision-making processes, specifying the proportion in relation to gender;

e) procedures for periodic evaluation of the performance of all ministries and tasks within the Church.

We need to realize that this is not a bureaucratic commitment for its own sake, but a communicative effort that proves to be a powerful educational tool in view of changing culture, as well as allowing us to give greater visibility to many valuable initiatives that refer to the Church and its institutions. which too often remain hidden.

### **Synodality and participatory bodies**

103. The participation of the baptized in decision-making processes, as well as the practices of accounting and evaluation, are carried out through institutional mediation, first of all the participatory bodies that canon law already provides for at the level of the local Church. In the Latin Church it is a question of: Diocesan Synod (cf. CIC, can. 466), Presbyteral Council (cf. CIC, can. 500, § 2), Diocesan Pastoral Council (cf. CIC, can. 514, § 1), Parish Pastoral Council (cf. CIC, can. 536), Diocesan and Parish Council for Economic Affairs (cf. CIC, cann. 493 and 537). In the Eastern Catholic Churches it is a question of: Eparchial Assembly (cf. CCEO, can. 235 ff.), Eparchial Council for Economic Affairs (cf. CCEO, can. 262

ff.), Presbyteral Council (CCEO can. 264), Eparchial Pastoral Council (CCEO can. 272. ff.), Parish Councils (cf. CCEO can. 295). The members are members of it on the basis of their ecclesial role according to their responsibilities differentiated in various ways (charisms, ministries, experience or competence, etc.). Each of these organisms participates in the discernment necessary for the inculturated proclamation of the Gospel, the mission of the community in its own environment and the witness of the baptized who compose it. It also contributes to decision-making processes in the established forms and constitutes an area for reporting and evaluation, having in turn to evaluate and account for its work. Participatory bodies are one of the most promising areas on which to act for a rapid implementation of the synodal guidelines, leading to changes that can be perceived quickly.

104. A synodal Church is based on the existence, efficiency and effective, and not just nominal, vitality of these participatory bodies, as well as on their functioning in conformity with canonical prescriptions or legitimate customs and on respect for the statutes and regulations governing them. For this reason, they should be made obligatory, as required at all stages of the synodal process, and should be able to play their role fully, not in a purely formal way, in a form appropriate to the different local contexts.

105. It is also appropriate to intervene in the functioning of these bodies, starting with the adoption of a synodal working methodology. Conversation in the Spirit, with appropriate adaptations, can be a point of reference. Particular attention should be paid to the way in which members are appointed. When election is not envisaged, a synodal consultation is to be carried out that expresses as much as possible the reality of the community or the local Church and the authority is to proceed with the appointment on the basis of its results, respecting the articulation between consultation and deliberation described above. It is also necessary to provide that the members of diocesan and parish pastoral councils have the faculty to propose topics to be included on the agenda, by analogy with what happens to the members of the presbyteral council.

106. Equal attention must be paid to the composition of participatory bodies, so as to encourage greater involvement of women, young people and those living in conditions of poverty or marginalization. Furthermore, it is essential that these bodies include baptized persons engaged in the witness of faith in the ordinary realities of life and social dynamics, with a recognized apostolic and missionary disposition, not only persons engaged in the organization of life and services within the community. In this way, ecclesial discernment will benefit from greater openness, a capacity for analysis of reality and a plurality of perspectives. On the basis of the needs of the different contexts, it may be appropriate to provide for the participation of representatives of other Churches and Christian Communions, by analogy with what happens in the Synodal Assembly, or of representatives of other religions present in the territory. The local Churches and their groupings can more easily indicate some criteria for the composition of the participatory bodies appropriate to each context.

107. The Assembly paid particular attention to the experiences of reform and good practices already in place, such as the creation of networks of Pastoral Councils at the level of basic communities, parishes and zones, up to the diocesan Pastoral Council. As a model of consultation and listening, it is also proposed to hold ecclesial assemblies with a certain regularity at all levels, trying not to limit consultation within the Catholic Church, but opening up to listening to the contribution of other Churches and Christian Communions and remaining attentive to the religions in the area.

108. The Assembly proposes that the Diocesan Synod and the Eparchial Assembly be given greater value as organs for the regular consultation by the Bishop of the portion of the People of God entrusted to

him, as a place of listening, prayer and discernment, especially when it is a question of choices relevant to the life and mission of a local Church. The diocesan Synod can also constitute an area of accountability and evaluation: the Bishop presents to it an account of the pastoral activity in the various sectors, the implementation of the pastoral plan, the reception of the synodal processes of the whole Church, the initiatives in the field of *safeguarding*, as well as the administration of temporal finances and goods. It is therefore necessary to strengthen the canonical provisions on the matter, so as to better reflect the synodal missionary character of each local Church, providing that diocesan Synods and Eparchial Assemblies meet on a regular basis that is not excessively rarefied.

#### **Part IV – A Bountiful Catch**

The conversion of ties

*The other disciples, on the other hand, came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish [...] Then Simon Peter got into the boat and drew the net full of one hundred and fifty-three large fish to the ground. And although they were many, the net was not torn (Jn 21:8, 11)*

109. The nets cast on the word of the Risen Lord have made it possible to catch abundantly. Everyone collaborates in dragging the net, Pietro has a particular role. In the Gospel, fishing is an action carried out together: each one has a precise task, different but coordinated with that of the others. This is the synodal Church, made up of bonds that unite in communion and spaces for the variety of every people and every culture. At a time when the experience of the places where the Church is rooted and pilgrim is changing, it is necessary to cultivate in new forms the exchange of gifts and the interweaving of the bonds that unite us, sustained by the ministry of the Bishops in communion with one another and with the Bishop of Rome.

#### **Rooted and pilgrims**

110. The proclamation of the Gospel, by awakening faith in the hearts of men and women, leads to the foundation of a Church in a particular place. The Church cannot be understood without being rooted in a concrete territory, in a space and in a time where a shared experience of encounter with God who saves is formed. The local dimension of the Church preserves the rich diversity of expressions of faith rooted in specific cultural and historical contexts, and the communion of the Churches manifests the communion of the faithful within the one Church. In this way, synodal conversion invites each person to widen the space of his or her heart, the first "place" in which all our relationships resonate, rooted in each person's personal relationship with Christ Jesus and His Church. This is the source and condition for any reform in a synodal key of the bonds of belonging and ecclesial places. Pastoral action cannot be limited to caring for relationships between people who already feel in harmony with each other, but must foster the encounter with every man and every woman.

111. The experience of rooting must come to terms with profound socio-cultural changes that are modifying the perception of places. The concept of place can no longer be understood in purely geographical and spatial terms, but evokes in our time the belonging to a network of relationships and a culture whose territorial roots are more dynamic and flexible than ever. Urbanization is one of the main drivers of this change: today, for the first time in human history, the majority of the world's population lives in urban settings. Large cities are often human agglomerations without history and without identity in which people live as islands. Traditional territorial ties change meaning, making the boundaries of

parishes and dioceses less defined. The Church is called to live in these contexts, rebuilding community life, giving a face to anonymous realities and weaving fraternal relationships. To this end, in addition to valuing the structures that still prove to be suitable, missionary creativity is needed that explores new forms of pastoral care and identifies concrete paths of care. It remains true, however, that rural realities, some of which are true existential peripheries, should not be neglected and require specific pastoral attention, as well as places of marginalization and exclusion.

112. Our times are also characterised by the increase in human mobility, motivated by various reasons. Refugees and migrants often form dynamic communities, even in their religious practices, making the place where they settle multicultural. Some of them maintain close ties with their countries of origin, especially thanks to digital media, and experience difficulty in weaving ties in the new country; others remain rootless. Even the inhabitants of the places of immigration are questioned by the reception of those who arrive. Everyone experiences the impact caused by the encounter with diversity of geographical, cultural and linguistic origin and is called to build intercultural communities. The impact of migration on the life of the Churches should not be overlooked. In this sense, the situation of some Eastern Catholic Churches is emblematic, due to the growing number of faithful in the diaspora; new approaches are required so that ties with one's own Church of origin are maintained, and new ones are created, respecting the different spiritual and cultural roots.

113. The spread of digital culture, which is particularly evident among young people, is also profoundly changing the perception of space and time, influencing daily activities, communications and interpersonal relationships, including faith. The possibilities that the network offers reconfigure relationships, ties and borders. Although today we are more connected than ever, we often experience loneliness and marginalization. *Social media* can also be used by economic and political stakeholders who, by manipulating people, disseminate ideologies and generate aggressive polarizations. This reality finds us unprepared and requires the choice to dedicate resources so that the digital environment is a prophetic place of mission and proclamation. The local Churches should encourage, support and accompany those who are engaged in the mission in the digital environment. Christian digital communities and groups, especially young people, are also called to reflect on the way in which they create bonds of belonging, promote encounter and dialogue, offer formation among peers, developing a synodal way of being Church. The network, made up of connections, offers new opportunities to better live the synodal dimension of the Church.

114. These social and cultural developments call on the Church to rethink the meaning of her "local" dimension and to question her organizational forms, in order to better serve her mission. While recognizing the value of rooting in concrete geographical and cultural contexts, it is essential to understand the "place" as the historical reality in which human experience takes shape. It is there, in the web of relationships that are established there, that the Church is called to express her sacramentality (cf. LG 1) and to carry out its mission.

115. The relationship between place and space also suggests a reflection on the Church as "home". When it is not intended as a closed, inaccessible space, to be defended at all costs, the image of the home evokes possibilities of welcome, hospitality and inclusion. Creation itself is a common home, in which the members of the one human family live with all other creatures. Our commitment, sustained by the Spirit, is to ensure that the Church is perceived as a welcoming home, a sacrament of encounter and salvation, a school of communion for all the sons and daughters of God. The Church is also the

People of God journeying with Christ, within whom everyone is called to be a pilgrim of hope. A sign of this is the traditional practice of pilgrimages. Popular piety is one of the places of a missionary synodal Church.

116. The local Church, understood as a Diocese or Eparchy, is the fundamental setting in which the communion of the Baptized in Christ is most fully manifested. In it the community is gathered in the celebration of the Eucharist presided over by the Bishop. Each local Church is internally articulated and, at the same time, is in relationship with the other local Churches.

117. One of the principal articulations of the local Church that history has handed down to us is the parish. The parish community, which meets in the celebration of the Eucharist, is a privileged place of relationships, welcome, discernment and mission. Changes in the conception and way of living the relationship with the territory require us to understand its configuration. What characterizes it is a proposal for community on a non-elective basis. People of different generations, professions, geographical origins, social classes and living conditions gather there. In order to respond to the new demands of the mission, it is called to open itself to new forms of pastoral action that take into account the mobility of people and the "existential territory" in which their lives develop. By promoting Christian Initiation in a particular way and offering accompaniment and formation, he will be able to support people in the different stages of life and in the fulfilment of their mission in the world. In this way it will become clearer that the parish is not centered on itself, but oriented to the mission and called to support the commitment of so many people who in different ways live and bear witness to their faith in their profession and in social, cultural and political activity. In many regions of the world, small Christian communities or basic ecclesial communities are the terrain on which intense relationships of closeness and reciprocity can flourish, offering the opportunity to live synodality concretely.

118. We recognize that Institutes of Consecrated Life, Societies of Apostolic Life, as well as Associations, Movements and new Communities have the ability to take root in the territory and at the same time to connect different places and environments, even at the national or international level. Often it is their action, together with that of many individuals and informal groups, that brings the Gospel to the most diverse places: hospitals, prisons, homes for the elderly, reception centers for migrants, minors, marginalized and victims of violence; educational and training places, schools and universities, where young people and families meet; places of culture, politics and integral human development where new forms of living together are imagined and built. Let us also look with gratitude at monasteries, places of convocation and discernment, a prophecy of a "beyond" that concerns the whole Church and guides her journey. It is the specific responsibility of the diocesan or eparchial Bishop to animate this multiplicity and to foster the bonds of unity. Institutes and groups are called to act in synergy with the local Church, participating in the dynamism of synodality.

119. The appreciation of the "intermediate" places between the local Church and the universal Church – such as the ecclesiastical Province and groupings of Churches on a national or continental basis – can also foster a more significant presence of the Church in the places of our time. Today's increased mobility and interconnections make the boundaries between the Churches fluid and often require thinking and acting within a "vast socio-cultural territory", in which, excluding every form of "false particularism", Christian life is "commensurate with the genius and character of each culture" (AG 22).

## **Gift Exchange**

120. Walking together in different places as disciples of Jesus in the diversity of charisms and ministries, as well as in the exchange of gifts between the Churches, is an effective sign of the presence of God's love and mercy in Christ who accompanies, sustains and directs humanity's journey towards the Kingdom through the breath of the Holy Spirit. The exchange of gifts involves all dimensions of the Church's life. Constituted in Christ as the People of God by all the peoples of the earth and dynamically articulated in the communion of the local Churches, of their groupings, of the Churches *sui iuris* within the one and Catholic Church, she lives her mission by fostering and welcoming "all the riches, resources and forms of life of peoples in what is good in them and by accepting them purifies them, consolidates and elevates them" (LG 13). The exhortation of the Apostle Peter – "as good stewards of God's manifold grace, each one of you should put at the service of others the gift you have received" (1 Pt 4:10) – can certainly be applied to each local Church. A paradigmatic and inspiring example of this exchange of gifts, which today needs to be lived and revisited with particular care because of the changed and pressing historical circumstances, is that between the Churches of the Latin tradition and the Eastern Catholic Churches. A significant horizon of novelty and hope in which forms of exchange of gifts, of the search for the common good and of coordinated commitment to social issues of global importance can be realized is the one that is emerging, for example, in large supranational and intercultural geographical areas such as the Amazon, the Congo River basin, the Mediterranean Sea.

121. The Church, at the local level and in her Catholic unity, presents herself as a network of relationships through which the prophecy of the culture of encounter, of social justice, of the inclusion of marginal groups, of fraternity among peoples, of care for our common home circulates and is promoted. The concrete exercise of this prophecy requires that the goods of each Church be shared in a spirit of solidarity, without paternalism and welfarism, with respect for different identities and in the promotion of healthy reciprocity, with the commitment – where necessary – to heal the wounds of memory and to undertake paths of reconciliation. The exchange of gifts and the sharing of resources between local Churches in different regions foster the unity of the Church, creating bonds between the Christian communities involved. It is necessary to focus on the conditions to be guaranteed so that priests who come to the aid of Churches poor in clergy are not only a functional remedy, but a resource for the growth of the Church that sends them and that which receives them. Similarly, it is necessary to work to ensure that economic aid does not degenerate into welfarism, but promotes evangelical solidarity and is managed in a transparent and reliable way.

122. The exchange of gifts also has a crucial significance on the journey towards full and visible unity among all the Christian Churches and Communions and, moreover, represents an effective sign of that unity in the faith and love of Christ which promotes the credibility and impact of the Christian mission (cf. Jn 17:21). Saint John Paul II applied this expression to ecumenical dialogue: "Dialogue is not just an exchange of ideas. In some way it is always an 'exchange of gifts'" (UUS 28). It was in the commitment to incarnate the one Gospel in the diversity of cultural contexts, historical circumstances and social challenges that the different Christian traditions, listening to the Word of God and the voice of the Holy Spirit, have generated over the centuries abundant fruits of holiness, charity, spirituality, theology, and solidarity at the social and cultural levels. The time has come to treasure these precious riches: with generosity, with sincerity, without prejudice, with gratitude to the Lord, with mutual openness, making gifts of them to one another without presuming that they are our exclusive property. The example of the saints and witnesses to the faith of other Christian Churches and Communions is also a gift that we can receive, inserting their memory into our liturgical calendar, especially for the martyrs.

123. In *the Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together*, signed by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Ahmed Al-Tayyeb in Abu Dhabi on 4 February 2019, the desire to "adopt the culture of dialogue as the way, common collaboration as conduct, mutual knowledge as the method and criterion" is declared. It is not a question of an unrealistic aspiration or of an optional aspect in the journey of the People of God in the present day of history. On this path, a synodal Church is committed to journeying, in the different places where she lives, with believers of other religions and with people of other convictions, freely sharing the joy of the Gospel and gratefully accepting their respective gifts: to build together, as brothers and sisters all, in a spirit of mutual exchange and help (cf. GS 40), justice, fraternity, peace and interreligious dialogue. In some regions, small neighbourhood communities, where people meet regardless of religious affiliation, offer a favourable environment for a threefold dialogue: of life, of action and of prayer.

### **Bonds for Unity: Bishops' Conferences and Ecclesial Assemblies**

124. The horizon of communion in the exchange of gifts is the inspiring criterion of relations between the Churches. It combines attention to the bonds that form the unity of the whole Church with the recognition and appreciation of the particularities linked to the context in which each local Church lives, with its history and tradition. The adoption of a synodal style allows the Churches to move at different paces. Differences in rhythm can be valued as an expression of legitimate diversity and as opportunities for the exchange of gifts and mutual enrichment. This common horizon requires discerning, identifying and promoting concrete structures and practices to be a synodal Church on mission.

125. Episcopal Conferences express and implement the collegiality of Bishops in order to foster communion between the Churches and respond more effectively to the needs of pastoral life. They are a fundamental tool for creating bonds, sharing experiences and good practices between the Churches, adapting Christian life and the expression of faith to different cultures. They also play an important role in the development of synodality, with the involvement of the entire People of God. On the basis of what emerged during the synodal process, it is proposed:

- a) to reap the fruits of reflection on the theological and juridical status of Episcopal Conferences;
- b) to specify the scope of the doctrinal and disciplinary competence of the Episcopal Conferences. Without compromising the authority of the Bishop in the Church entrusted to him or jeopardizing the unity and catholicity of the Church, the collegial exercise of this competence can foster the authentic teaching of the one faith in an appropriate and inculturated way in different contexts, identifying the appropriate liturgical, catechetical, disciplinary, pastoral, theological and spiritual expressions (cf. AG 22);
- c) to evaluate the experience of the real functioning of the Episcopal Conferences, of the relations between the episcopates and with the Holy See, in order to identify the concrete reforms to be implemented. Visits *ad limina Apostolorum* can be a propitious occasion for such evaluation;
- d) to ensure that all the Dioceses are part of an ecclesiastical Province and an Episcopal Conference (cf. CD 40);
- e) to specify the ecclesial bond that the decisions taken by an Episcopal Conference generate, with respect to its own Diocese, for each Bishop who has participated in those same decisions;

126. In the synodal process, the seven continental Ecclesial Assemblies, held at the beginning of 2023, represented a significant novelty and are a legacy to be valued as an effective way of implementing the Council's teaching on the value of "every great socio-cultural territory" in the search for "a deeper arrangement of the whole sphere of Christian life" (AG 22). It will be necessary to clarify better its theological and canonical status, as well as that of the continental groupings of Episcopal Conferences, in order to be able to exploit their potential for the further development of a synodal Church. It is the responsibility of the Presidents of the continental groupings of Bishops' Conferences in particular to encourage and support the continuation of this experience.

127. In ecclesial assemblies (regional, national, continental), the members who express and represent the variety of the People of God (including the Bishops) participate in the discernment that will enable the Bishops, collegially, to take the decisions to which they are bound by virtue of the ministry entrusted to them. This experience shows how synodality makes it possible to concretely articulate the involvement of all (the holy People of God) and the ministry of some (the College of Bishops) in the process of decisions relating to the mission of the Church. It is proposed that discernment can include, in forms appropriate to the diversity of contexts, spaces for listening and dialogue with other Christians, representatives of other religions, public institutions, civil society organizations and society as a whole.

128. Because of particular social and political situations, some Episcopal Conferences have difficulties in participating in continental assemblies or supra-national ecclesial bodies. It will be the Holy See's responsibility to help these Episcopal Conferences, promoting dialogue and mutual trust with States, so that they may be given the opportunity to enter into relations with other Episcopal Conferences, with a view to exchanging gifts.

129. In order to achieve a "salutary 'decentralization'" (EG 16) and an effective inculturation of the faith, it is necessary not only to recognize the role of Episcopal Conferences, but also to re-evaluate the institution of particular Councils, both provincial and plenary, the periodic celebration of which has been an obligation for much of the Church's history and which are provided for by the law in force in the Latin legal system (cf. CIC can. 439-446). They should be convened periodically. The procedure for the recognition of the conclusions of particular Councils by the Holy See (*recognitio*) should be reformed, to encourage their timely publication, by indicating precise time limits or, in the case of purely pastoral or disciplinary matters (not directly concerning questions of faith, morals or sacramental discipline), by introducing a juridical presumption, equivalent to tacit consent.

### **The service of the Bishop of Rome**

130. The synodal process has also helped to revisit, in the light of synodality, the ways in which the Bishop of Rome exercises his ministry. Synodality, in fact, articulates in a symphonic way the community ("all"), collegial ("some") and personal ("one") dimensions of the individual Churches and of the entire Church. In this perspective, the Pope's Petrine ministry is inherent in the synodal dynamic, as well as the community aspect, which includes the whole People of God, and the collegial dimension of the episcopal ministry (cf. CTI, no. 64).

131. We can therefore understand the significance of the Council's affirmation that "in ecclesial communion there are legitimate particular Churches, which enjoy their own traditions, without prejudice to the primacy of the Chair of Peter, which presides over the universal communion of charity, guarantees legitimate diversity and at the same time ensures that the particular not only does not harm

unity, but rather serves it" (LG 13). The Bishop of Rome, the principle and foundation of the Church's unity (cf. LG 23), is the guarantor of synodality: it is up to him to convoke the Church to the Synod, to preside over it and to confirm its results. As the Successor of Peter, he has a unique role in safeguarding the deposit of faith and morals, ensuring that synodal processes are fruitful for unity and witness. Together with the Bishop of Rome, the College of Bishops has an irreplaceable role in shepherding the whole Church (cf. LG 22-23) and in promoting synodality in all the local Churches.

132. As guarantor of unity in diversity, the Bishop of Rome ensures that the identity of the Eastern Catholic Churches is safeguarded, with respect for their centuries-old theological, canonical, liturgical, spiritual and pastoral traditions. These Churches have their own deliberative synodal structures: Synod of Bishops of the Patriarchal Church and Major Archiepiscopal Church (cf. CCEO c. 102.ss., 152), Provincial Council (cf. CCEO can. 137), Council of Hierarchs (cf. CCEO cc. 155, § 1, 164 ff.), and, finally, Assemblies of Hierarchs of different Churches *sui iuris* (cf. CCEO can. 322). As Churches *sui iuris* in full communion with the Bishop of Rome, they preserve their Eastern identity and their autonomy. In the context of synodality, it is opportune to revisit history together in order to heal the wounds of the past and to deepen the ways in which communion can be lived, which also involve an adaptation in relations between the Eastern Catholic Churches and the Roman Curia. Relations between the Latin Church and the Eastern Catholic Churches must be characterized by an exchange of gifts, collaboration and mutual enrichment.

133. In order to increase these relations, the Synodal Assembly proposes the establishment of a Council of Patriarchs, Major Archbishops and Metropolitans of the Eastern Catholic Churches presided over by the Pope, which would be an expression of synodality and an instrument for promoting communion and sharing of the liturgical, theological, canonical and spiritual patrimony. The exodus of many Eastern faithful to regions of the Latin rite risks compromising their identity. To address this situation, instruments and norms should be developed aimed at strengthening as much as possible the collaboration between the Latin Church and the Eastern Catholic Churches. The Synodal Assembly recommends sincere dialogue and fraternal collaboration between Latin and Eastern Bishops, in order to ensure better pastoral care for the Eastern faithful who do not have priests of their own rite and to guarantee, with proper autonomy, the involvement of Eastern Bishops in Episcopal Conferences. Finally, he proposes to the Holy Father to convoke a Special Synod to promote the consolidation and revival of the Eastern Catholic Churches.

134. Reflection on the exercise of the Petrine ministry in a synodal key should be conducted in the perspective of "healthy 'decentralization'" (EG 16), urged by Pope Francis and requested by many Episcopal Conferences. In the formulation given by the Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium*, it implies "leaving to the competence of Pastors the faculty of resolving in the exercise of 'their own task as teachers' and Pastors questions with which they know well and which do not touch the unity of doctrine, discipline and communion of the Church, always acting with that co-responsibility which is the fruit and expression of that specific *mysterium communionis* which is the Church" (PE II, 2). To proceed in this direction, it could be possible to identify through a theological and canonical study which matters should be reserved to the Pope (*reservatio papalis*) and which can be returned to the Bishops in their Churches or groupings of Churches, in line with the recent Motu Proprio *Competentias quasdam decernere* (February 15, 2022). In fact, it assigns "certain competences, regarding code provisions aimed at guaranteeing the unity of the discipline of the whole Church, to the executive power of the Churches and local ecclesial institutions" on the basis of the "ecclesial dynamics of communion" (preface). Even

the elaboration of canonical norms by those who have the task and authority in the Church should have a synodal style and mature as the fruit of ecclesial discernment.

135. The Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium* has configured the service of the Roman Curia in a synodal and missionary sense, insisting that it "does not place itself between the Pope and the Bishops, but rather places itself at the service of both in the ways that are proper to the nature of each one" (PE I.8). Its implementation should promote greater collaboration between the Dicasteries and encourage listening to the local Churches. Before publishing important normative documents, the Dicasteries are urged to initiate a consultation of the Episcopal Conferences and corresponding bodies of the Eastern Catholic Churches. In the logic of transparency and accountability, outlined above, forms of periodic evaluation of the work of the Curia could possibly be envisaged. Such an evaluation, in a missionary synodal perspective, could also concern the Papal Representatives. The *visits ad limina Apostolorum* are the highest moment of the relations of the Pastors of the local Churches with the Bishop of Rome and with his closest collaborators in the Roman Curia. Many Bishops wish to see a review of the form in which they are carried out, so as to make them more and more opportunities for open exchange and mutual listening. It is important for the good of the Church to foster mutual knowledge and bonds of communion among the members of the College of Cardinals, also taking into account their diversity of origin and culture. Synodality must inspire their collaboration in the Petrine ministry and their collegial discernment in ordinary and extraordinary Consistories.

136. Among the places for practising synodality and collegiality at the level of the whole Church, the Synod of Bishops certainly stands out, which the Apostolic Constitution *Episcopalis Communio* transformed from a one-off event into an ecclesial process. Established by Saint Paul VI as an assembly of Bishops convoked to participate, through the council, in the solicitude of the Roman Pontiff for the whole Church, it is now, in the form of a phased process, the expression and instrument of the constitutive relationship between the entire People of God, the College of Bishops and the Pope. The entire holy People of God, the Bishops to whom its individual portions are entrusted and the Bishop of Rome participate fully in the synodal process, each according to his or her own function. This participation is made manifest by the Synodal Assembly gathered around the Pope, which, in its composition, shows the catholicity of the Church. In particular, as Pope Francis explained, the composition of this XVI Ordinary General Assembly is "more than a contingent fact. It expresses a way of exercising the episcopal ministry consistent with the living Tradition of the Churches and with the teaching of the Second Vatican Council" (*Address to the First General Congregation of the Second Session of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops*, 2 October 2024). The Synod of Bishops, while preserving its episcopal nature, has seen and will be able to see in the future in the participation of other members of the People of God "the form that the exercise of episcopal authority is called to take in a Church aware of being constitutively relational and therefore synodal" (*ibid.*) for the mission. In deepening the identity of the Synod of Bishops, it is essential that in the synodal process and in the Assemblies the articulation between the involvement of all (the holy People of God), the ministry of some (the College of Bishops) and the presidency of one (the successor of Peter) appears and is concretely realized.

137. One of the most significant fruits of the Synod 2021-2024 is the intensity of the ecumenical zeal. The need to find "a form of exercising the Primacy that [...] opens up to a new situation" (UUS 95) is a fundamental challenge both for a missionary synodal Church and for Christian unity. The Synod welcomes the recent publication of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity *The Bishop of Rome*.

*Primacy and synodality in ecumenical dialogues and in responses to the encyclical "Ut unum sint",* which offers ideas for further study. The document shows that the promotion of Christian unity is an essential aspect of the ministry of the Bishop of Rome and that the ecumenical journey has fostered a deeper understanding of it. The concrete proposals it contains for a re-reading or official commentary on the dogmatic definitions of the First Vatican Council on primacy, a clearer distinction between the different responsibilities of the Pope, the promotion of synodality and the search for a model of unity based on an ecclesiology of communion, offer promising prospects for the ecumenical journey. The Synodal Assembly hopes that this document will serve as a basis for further reflection with other Christians, "evidently together", on the exercise of the Bishop of Rome's ministry of unity as "a service of love recognized by both" (UUS 95).

138. The richness represented by the participation of fraternal delegates from other Churches and Christian Communion in the Synodal Assembly invites us to pay more attention to the synodal practices of our ecumenical partners, both in the East and in the West. Ecumenical dialogue is fundamental to developing an understanding of synodality and the unity of the Church. It urges us to imagine ecumenical synodal practices, up to forms of consultation and discernment on questions of shared and urgent interest, such as the celebration of an ecumenical Synod on evangelization. It also invites us to give each other an account of who we are, what we do, and what we teach. At the root of this possibility is the fact that we are united in the one Baptism, from which flow the identity of the People of God and the dynamism of communion, participation and mission.

139. The year 2025, the Jubilee Year, also marks the anniversary of the First Ecumenical Council, in which the Symbol of the Faith that unites all Christians was formulated in a synodal way. The preparation and joint commemoration of the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea should be an opportunity to deepen and confess together the Christological faith and to put into practice forms of synodality among Christians of all traditions. It will also be an opportunity to launch bold initiatives for a common date of Easter, so that we can celebrate the Lord's Resurrection on the same day, as will providentially happen precisely in 2025 and thus give greater missionary strength to the proclamation of the One who is the life and salvation of the whole world.

## **Part V – "I send you too"**

### **Forming a Missionary Disciple People**

*Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (Jn 20:21-22).*

140. On Easter evening, Christ gives his disciples the messianic gift of his peace and makes them sharers in his mission. His peace is fullness of being, harmony with God, with his brothers and sisters, and with creation; the mission is to proclaim the Kingdom of God, offering every person, no one excluded, the mercy and love of the Father. The delicate gesture that accompanies the words of the Risen One evokes what God did in the beginning. Now, in the Upper Room, with the breath of the Spirit, the new creation begins: a people of missionary disciples is born.

141. In order for the holy People of God to be able to bear witness to the joy of the Gospel to all, growing in the practice of synodality, it needs adequate formation: first of all in the freedom of sons and daughters of God in following Jesus Christ, contemplated in prayer and recognized in the poor.

Synodality, in fact, implies a profound vocational and missionary awareness, the source of a renewed style in ecclesial relations, of new participatory dynamics and ecclesial discernment, and of a culture of evaluation, which cannot be established without the accompaniment of targeted formation processes. Formation in the synodal style of the Church will promote the awareness that the gifts received in Baptism are talents to be made fruitful for the good of all: they cannot be hidden or remain inactive.

142. The formation of missionary disciples begins with Christian initiation and is rooted in it. In the history of each one there is the encounter with many people and groups or small communities that have contributed to introducing us to the relationship with the Lord and to the communion of the Church: parents and family members, godparents, catechists and educators, animators of the liturgy and workers in the field of charity, deacons, priests and the Bishop himself. Sometimes, once the path of Initiation is concluded, the link with the community is weakened and formation is neglected. However, being missionary disciples of the Lord is not a goal achieved once and for all. It implies continual conversion, growth in love "until you reach the measure of the fullness of Christ" (Eph 4:13) and openness to the gifts of the Spirit for a living and joyful witness to the faith. For this reason it is important to rediscover how the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist forms Christians: "The fullness of our formation is conformation to Christ [...]: it is not a question of an abstract mental process, but of becoming Him" (DD 41). For many of the faithful, the Sunday Eucharist is the only contact with the Church: taking care of its celebration in the best possible way, with particular regard to the homily and the "active participation" (SC 14) of all, is decisive for synodality. In the Mass, in fact, it happens as a grace given from on high, before being the result of our efforts: under the presidency of *one* and thanks to the ministry of *some*, *all* can participate in the twofold table of the Word and the Bread. The gift of communion, mission and participation – the three pillars of synodality – is realized and renewed in every Eucharist.

143. One of the requests that has emerged most forcefully and from all sides throughout the synodal process is that formation be integral, continuous and shared. Its purpose is not only the acquisition of theoretical knowledge, but the promotion of the capacity for openness and encounter, sharing and collaboration, reflection and discernment in common, and theological reading of concrete experiences. It must therefore call into question all the dimensions of the person (intellectual, affective, relational and spiritual) and include concrete experiences suitably accompanied. Equally marked was the insistence on the need for a formation in which men and women, lay people, consecrated persons, ordained ministers and candidates for the ordained ministry take part together, thus allowing growth in mutual knowledge and esteem and in the ability to collaborate. This requires the presence of suitable and competent formators, capable of confirming with their lives what they transmit with words: only in this way will formation be truly generative and transformative. Furthermore, the contribution that pedagogical disciplines can make to the preparation of well-targeted training courses, attentive to learning processes in adulthood and to the accompaniment of individuals and communities, should not be overlooked. We must therefore invest in the training of trainers.

144. The Church already has many places and resources for the formation of missionary disciples: families, small communities, parishes, ecclesial groups, seminaries, religious communities, academic institutions, but also places of service and work with the marginalized, missionary and volunteer experiences. In all these areas, the community expresses its ability to educate in discipleship and to accompany in witness, in an encounter that often brings together people of different generations. Popular piety is also a precious treasure of the Church, which teaches the entire People of God on their

journey. In the Church, no one is merely the recipient of formation: everyone is an active subject and has something to give to others.

145. Among the formative practices that can receive new impetus from synodality, particular attention should be given to catechesis so that, in addition to being expressed in the itineraries of Christian initiation, it may be increasingly "outgoing" and extroverted. Communities of missionary disciples will be able to practice it in the sign of mercy and bring it closer to the experience of each one, bringing it to the existential peripheries, without losing the reference to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. In this way it can become a "laboratory of dialogue" with the men and women of our time (cf. Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization, *Directory for Catechesis*, 54) and enlighten their search for meaning. In many Churches, catechists are the fundamental resource for accompaniment and formation; in others, their service must be more appreciated and supported by the community, leaving behind a logic of delegation, which contradicts synodality. Considering the extent of migratory phenomena, it is important that catechesis promote mutual knowledge among the Churches of the countries of origin and of reception.

146. In addition to specifically pastoral environments and resources, the Christian community is present in numerous other educational institutions such as schools, vocational training, universities, formation for social and political commitment, and the world of sport, music and art. Despite the diversity of cultural contexts, which determine very different practices and traditions, educational institutions of Catholic inspiration are often in contact with people who do not frequent other ecclesial environments. Inspired by the practices of synodality, they can become a laboratory of friendly and participatory relationships, in a context in which the testimony of life, skills and educational organization are above all lay and involve families as a priority. In particular, schools and universities of Catholic inspiration play an important role in the dialogue between faith and culture and in moral education in values, offering a formation oriented to Christ, the icon of life in fullness. When they succeed in doing so, they prove capable of promoting an alternative to the dominant models, often inspired by individualism and competition, thus also assuming a prophetic role. In some contexts, they are the only environment in which children and young people come into contact with the Church. When inspired by intercultural and interreligious dialogue, their educational action is also appreciated by people of other religious traditions as a form of human promotion.

147. Synodal formation shared by all the baptized constitutes the horizon within which to understand and practice the specific formation necessary for individual ministries and for the different forms of life. For this to happen, it is necessary that this be carried out as an exchange of gifts between different vocations (communion), with a view to a service to be carried out (mission) and in a style of involvement and education in differentiated co-responsibility (participation). This request, which emerged forcefully from the synodal process, often requires a demanding change of mentality and a renewed approach to formation environments and processes. It implies above all the interior readiness to allow oneself to be enriched by the encounter with brothers and sisters in the faith, overcoming prejudices and partisan visions. The ecumenical dimension of formation can only encourage this change of mentality.

148. Throughout the synodal process, the request has been widely expressed that the paths of discernment and formation of candidates for the ordained ministry be configured in a synodal style. This means that they must provide for a significant presence of female figures, an insertion into the daily life of the communities and education to collaborate with everyone in the Church and to practice ecclesial

discernment. This implies a courageous investment of energy in the preparation of formators. The Assembly asks for a revision of the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* that incorporates the requests matured in the Synod, translating them into precise indications for a formation in synodality. Formation courses should be able to awaken in candidates a passion for the mission *ad gentes*. No less necessary is the formation of Bishops, so that they may ever better assume their mission of combining the gifts of the Spirit in unity and exercising the authority conferred on them in a synodal style. The synodal style of formation implies that the ecumenical dimension is present in all aspects of the paths to ordained ministry.

149. In the formation of the People of God for synodality, it is also necessary to take into consideration certain specific areas to which the synodal process has insistently drawn attention. The first concerns the impact of the digital environment on learning processes, the ability to concentrate, the perception of oneself and the world, the construction of interpersonal relationships. Digital culture constitutes a crucial dimension of the Church's witness in contemporary culture, as well as an emerging missionary field. For this reason, it is necessary to take care that the Christian message is present on the web in reliable ways, which do not distort its content in an ideological way. While digital has great potential to improve our lives, it can also cause harm and injury, through bullying, misinformation, sexual exploitation, and addiction. It is important for Church educational institutions to help children and adults develop critical skills to navigate the web safely.

150. Another area of great importance is the promotion in all ecclesial environments of a culture of safeguarding, in order to make communities increasingly safe places for minors and vulnerable persons. Work has already begun to equip Church structures with regulations and legal procedures that allow for the prevention of abuse and timely responses to inappropriate behavior. This commitment must be continued, offering specific adequate training to those who work in contact with minors and with the weakest adults, so that they act competently and know how to grasp the signals, often silent, of those who are experiencing a tragedy and need help. The reception and support of victims is a delicate and indispensable task, which requires great humanity and must be carried out with the help of qualified people. We must all allow ourselves to be shaken by their suffering and practice that closeness which, through concrete choices, lifts them, helps them and prepares a different future for all. It is essential that throughout the world the Church activates and promotes a culture of prevention and *safeguarding*, making communities increasingly safe places for minors and vulnerable people. While steps have been taken to prevent abuse, this commitment needs to be strengthened by offering specific and ongoing training to those working with children and vulnerable adults. *Safeguarding* processes must be constantly monitored and evaluated. Victims and survivors must be welcomed and supported with great sensitivity.

151. The themes of the Church's social doctrine, commitment to peace and justice, care for our common home and intercultural and interreligious dialogue must also be given greater expression among the People of God, so that the action of missionary disciples may have an impact on building a more just and fraternal world. The commitment to the defence of life and the rights of the person, to the just ordering of society, to the dignity of work, to an equitable and supportive economy, to integral ecology are part of the evangelizing mission that the Church is called to live and incarnate in history.

## **Conclusion**

### **A banquet for all peoples**

*As soon as they went ashore, they saw an ember fire with fish on it, and bread. [...] Jesus said to them, "Come and eat." And none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" because they knew well that it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so did the fish (Jn 21:9.12.13)*

152. The story of the miraculous catch of fish ends with a banquet. The Risen Lord asked the disciples to obey his word, to cast their nets and pull them ashore; it is He, however, who prepares the table and invites us to eat. There are loaves and fishes for everyone, as when he multiplied them for the hungry crowd. Above all, there is the wonder and enchantment of His presence, so clear and shining that it does not require questions. By eating with his own, after they had abandoned and denied him, the Risen One opens up again the space of communion and imprints forever on the disciples the mark of a mercy that opens wide to the future. For this reason, the witnesses of the Passover will be described as follows: "we who ate and drank with him after his resurrection from the dead" (Acts 10:41).

153. In the banquets of the Risen One, the image of the Prophet Isaiah, which inspired the work of the Synodal Assembly, is fulfilled: a superabundant and delicious table prepared by the Lord on the top of the mountain, a symbol of conviviality and communion, destined for all peoples (cf. Is 25:6-8). The table that the Lord prepares for His disciples after Easter is the sign that the eschatological banquet has already begun. Even if it will have its fullness only in heaven, the table of grace and mercy is already laid out for everyone and the Church has the mission of bringing this splendid proclamation to a changing world. As he nourishes himself in the Eucharist of the Body and Blood of the Lord, he knows that he cannot forget the poor, the least, the excluded, those who do not know love and are deprived of hope, nor those who do not believe in God or do not recognize themselves in any established religion. He brings them to the Lord in prayer and then goes out to meet them, with the creativity and boldness that the Spirit inspires. Thus the synodality of the Church becomes social prophecy, inspires new paths also for politics and the economy, collaborates with all those who believe in fraternity and peace in an exchange of gifts with the world.

154. In living the synodal process, we have become increasingly aware that the salvation to be received and proclaimed passes through relationships. We live it and bear witness to it together. History appears to us tragically marked by war, by rivalry for power, by a thousand injustices and abuses. We know, however, that the Spirit has placed in the heart of every human being the desire for authentic relationships and true bonds. Creation itself speaks of unity and sharing, of variety and interweaving between different forms of life. Everything comes from harmony and tends towards harmony, even when it suffers the devastating wound of evil. The ultimate meaning of synodality is the witness that the Church is called to give of God, Father and Son and Holy Spirit, the Harmony of love that pours out outside of itself to give itself to the world. Walking in synodal style, in the interweaving of our vocations, charisms and ministries, and, going out to meet everyone to bring the joy of the Gospel, we can live the communion that saves: with God, with all humanity and with all creation. We will then begin to experience, through sharing, the banquet of life that God offers to all peoples.

155. To the Virgin Mary, who bears the splendid title of *Hodegetria*, the one who indicates and guides the way, we entrust the results of this Synod. May she, Mother of the Church who in the Upper Room helped the nascent community to open itself to the newness of Pentecost, teach us to be a People of missionary disciples who walk together: a synodal Church.